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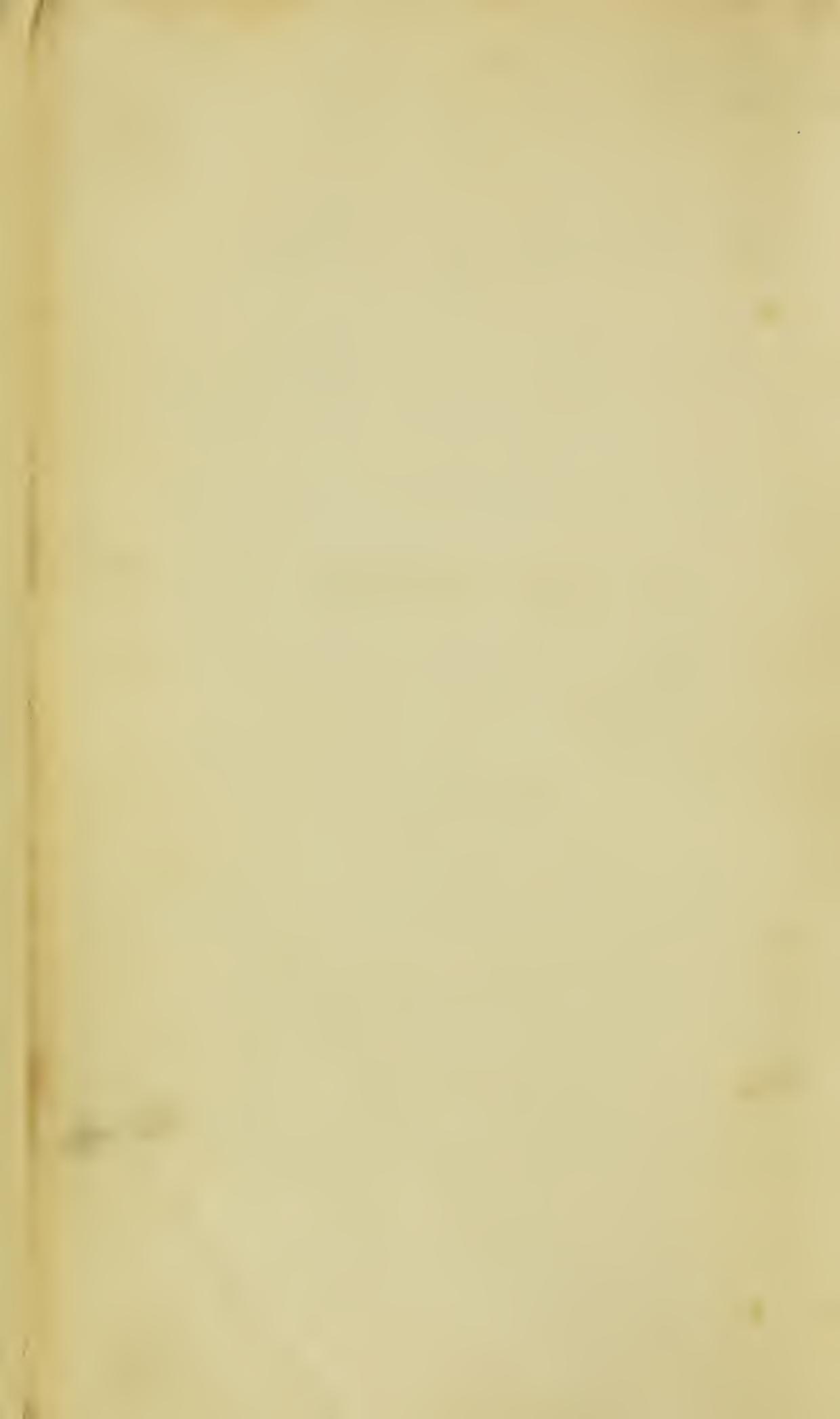
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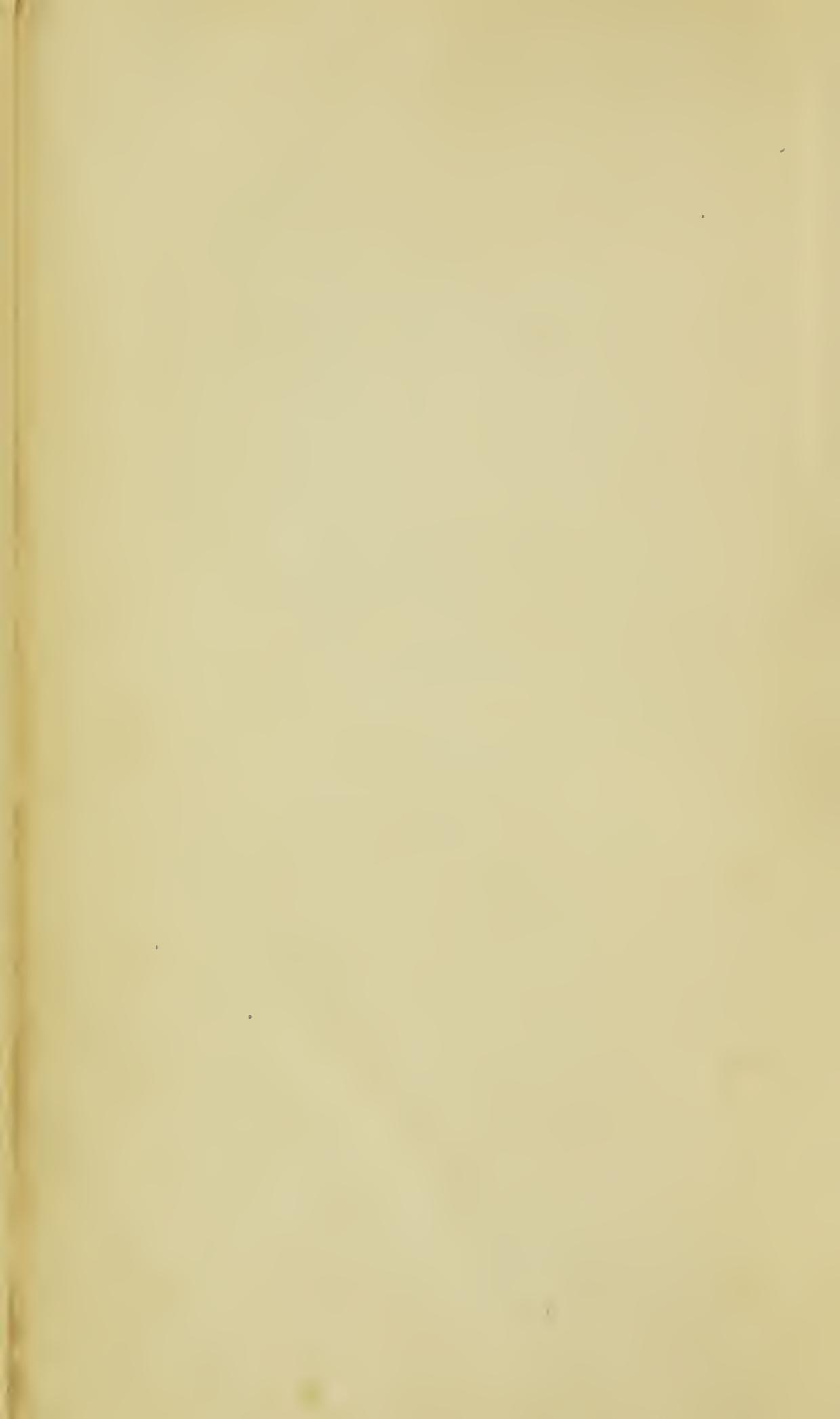
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THE STEP-MOTHER.

VOL. I.



THE

S T E P - M O T H E R.

BY

G. P. R. JAMES, Esq.

AUTHOR OF

“ RICHELIEU,” “ THE SMUGGLER,” “ ARRAH NEIL,” &c. &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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DEDICATION

TO

CHARLES LEVER, Esq.

MY DEAR LEVER,

A FEW words will be sufficient for the dedication of this book to one for whom I have so great a regard, and who, I am proud to believe, has as great a regard for me. Looking to those varied powers which your mind assuredly possesses, although you have, as yet, thought fit to display only a small portion of large treasures to the public, I could wish that this work were one of higher pretensions. *You* will understand, however, that it is not without high objects, though the tone may be lighter than that of my other productions. Neither will the blending of the comic with the tragic, in the depiction of

ordinary life, hide from you, as it may from many, the end I had in view.

Many classes of the English people have become so familiarized to what I must term “Cockney slang,” by the works of authors who have very little to trade upon but small peculiarities of dialect and character, that no apology may be necessary for making several of the actors on the scene speak in the exact jargon which I have heard similar persons use in similar circumstances, though I am not fond of the tongue, and should be disinclined to make it the staple of the book.

However, be the work good or bad, it will serve at least as an offering from friend to friend, as a testimony of admiration for genius and worth, and as a mark of sincere regard, from,

My dear Lever,

Yours ever,

G. P. R. JAMES.

THE STEP-MOTHER.

CHAPTER I.

IN a certain county of England, which cannot exactly be called a midland county, because at one point it comes within a few miles of the sea, there is a village, with a somewhat detailed description of which I must trouble the reader; as in this village and its immediate neighbourhood took place the principal incidents of the story about to be told. The scene is narrow, certainly, but very important things are often enacted in a very confined space; and though amongst the personages to be introduced appear neither kings nor statesmen, yet there are as strong passions stirred and as deep interest affected in private life, as in the movements of parties or governments.

The village, then, is situated upon the slope of a hill, extending from the top to the bottom. A few houses, indeed, are scattered along the valley, by the side of a river, swarming with fine trout; and there, too, in a pleasant and sheltered situation, stands the church, with the clergyman's house, a low-roofed but neat and comfortable residence, at the distance of about a hundred yards from the gate of the churchyard.

Half way up the hill is a white house, with a brass knocker on a mahogany door, and the traveller as he passes by, if he be not shut up in a close carriage, may see, through the left-hand window, ranges of bottles and gallipots upon numerous shelves, and a lad, with an apron before him, pounding in a mortar, or pouring liquids from one bottle into another. Written in letters so large that those who run may read, is inscribed upon a brass plate, "Mr. Nethersole, surgeon, &c.;" and very often, before the door, is seen standing a neat one-horse chaise, with a very respectable, plump, and well-conditioned horse figuring in the harness.

At the top of the hill, and at a short distance from the actual village, is a large red-brick dwelling-house, raised upon a bank formed by the cutting of the high road, along the side of which runs the wall of an extensive and well-

stocked garden. The mansion has every appearance of comfort and opulence, the windows are numerous and large, the spaces between wide, the chimneys many—indicating at least twenty rooms possessing the advantage of a fire-place—and the state of repair in which the whole is kept is exact and perfect. A high brick wall, with broken glass bottles upon the top—very unpleasant for the hands of urchins possessed with the spirit of appropriating other people's apples—encircles the premises, containing, perhaps, a couple of acres; and in this wall are three different entrances to the grounds: one a small door, reached by a flight of steps up the bank; another at the north side, presenting two large gates and a gravelled road; and the third on the side directly opposite to the small door above the bank, and communicating with a path, through some pleasant fields and lanes at the back of the village, which leads down to the church and the rectory. I may add, to render the picture complete, that the garden wall and entrance on the north side is sheltered by a fine grove of tall trees from the bleak air of a wide common beyond.

On the other side of the valley, and of the river, is another hill, higher, though less abrupt, than that on which the village stands. The thick

trees of a park, which lies on that side, hide the face of the ground from the lower part of the village; but the windows of the mansion which I have just described, looking over these giants of the forest, give a view of the interior of the park and of a fine old grey building, known in that part of the country as “The Hall.”

At the time at which the events I am about to relate took place the Hall was not in the very best state of repair, though by no means dilapidated. The old stones were rather green and mossy; a part of the copings might be seen here and there suffering from the ravages of time; the doors and windows had not been painted for more than thirty years; and the latter, though perfectly sound, were seldom cleaned. It was a large, rambling, irregular edifice, with a vast door and porch in the old style; many curious, ancient halls within; and having, without beauty, a grand and imposing air, from the gravity of its colouring and from its extent.

The park, however, and all that it contained—its long winding walks, the lawn before the house, the broad gravel terrace at the back, the gamekeeper’s cottage, the kitchen garden, the very wilderness—regular in its irregularity—were kept with the utmost neatness and propriety. The secret of this difference between the

appearance of the house and the grounds, was simply this: the proprietor was a nobleman of somewhat singular character, immersed in the politics of the day, passing the greater part of his time in London, and rarely spending more than six weeks in the course of each year at his house in the country. He was reputed to be avaricious, and was certainly haughty. That he was stern and reserved he made sufficiently apparent during his short residences in that neighbourhood, never associating with any of the gentlemen around, seldom exchanging a word with any one, and when forced to do so upon business, making his communications as laconic as might be. He was, also, it must be remarked, without wife, or child, and never brought any party down with him from London to the hall. A cook, a *valet de chambre*, a butler, and a footman, together with a personage who performed the offices of both coachman and groom with the occasional variation of a three-cornered hat and a round one, were the only people who accompanied him; and the old housekeeper, with a coëval house-maid, and a girl from the village hired while he was there and discharged when he was gone, were found sufficient to do the work of the house during his stay.

Thus it will be seen why the dwelling, though

not suffered to go to decay, was not kept in a high state of repair. The dining-room, the library, and his own bed-room were the only chambers of which he saw much ; and the old housekeeper declared that there was many a room in the house which his lordship had not set his foot in for thirty years. He did not, indeed, take much greater heed of the arrangements of the park, though he used apparently to find some pleasure in rambling through the wood-walks with his hands behind his back, and his eyes bent upon the ground ; but it is much to be doubted whether he would have discovered any little marks of negligence which might have taken place during his absence, had they been apparent. There was a person, however, who took a pride in the neatness and propriety of everything about him ; and this was the park-keeper, a blunt straightforward Englishman, clean and regular in all his habits, doing his duty faithfully and exactly, whether looked after or not, and having no great reverence for any mortal man, so long as he thought he was pleasing God, and satisfying his own conscience.

The poor old housekeeper, who was frightened out of her life at her lord, seldom ventured to point out that this or that required repair, and did so, when absolutely necessary, in so low a

voice that she was often interrupted by a cry of “ Speak out, woman ;” but the park-keeper went boldly up to his master whenever anything was wanted, told his story plainly, and generally got what he required. In the management and arrangement of the park, and all that it contained, he took great delight, and often did he say to himself, “ If my lord does not choose to live at it, that is his fault ; I will keep it fit for him.”

The noble owner of the property, however, never rewarded him with any praise of his exertions, or any observation upon their success, for, in truth, he never remarked them; coming down, as he called it, for relaxation, and yet bringing all the thoughts and cares of London down with him into the country, so that his mind had no more opportunity of resting upon the things that surrounded him than if he had still been in the capital.

Now, doubtless, the reader may imagine that because we have introduced this noble lord before any one else to his notice, and have spoken of himself and his dwelling somewhat at large, we intend to make him one of the principal characters in the story, and introduce him frequently upon the stage ; but such is not at all the case. You have seen him, dear reader, and you will never see him again. You may, indeed, hear his

name mentioned, but he will never more appear upon the stage.

The large red house, which, as we have seen was pitched upon the top of the opposite hill, was possessed by a gentleman as different in every respect from the owner of the Hall as it is possible to conceive; and we must go some way back to trace his history before the actual commencement of the tale; for this chapter must be taken as a sort of proem or introduction to what is to follow, in which I wish to gather together all that might be cumbersome or difficult in after details. The gentleman of whom I now speak was the son of a lawyer, who had risen to eminence in his profession, and obtained a seat upon the bench. The judge had not died very wealthy, however, and his eldest son followed his father's course, till he was elevated to the office of one of the Barons of the Exchequer; but the second and youngest, whose history we are about to hear, after having pursued a course of liberal education till he was about eighteen, was then placed in the house of a great merchant, and in due time became a partner in the firm. He was well to do when his father died, and the sum which he then shared with his brother made some addition to a fortune already considerable. He was a quiet, unobtrusive, and somewhat timid man, but clear-

sighted in most cases, and possessed of a fund of strong good sense, which would have been very serviceable to himself and others, had he not been withal, if not indolent, at all events very fond of peace and tranquillity. He had a great aversion to strong emotions of any kind, loved the ordinary course of business, was as great an enemy to adventurous speculation as the oldest partner in the house, and a great deal more so than the youngest. He did, however, make one bold speculation ; and it proved a successful one —he married, and, having chosen well, had every reason to be satisfied. His wife had everything but one to recommend her: she was very handsome, she was a lady by birth, and, what is of far more importance, by nature; she had accomplishments enough to make time pass pleasantly, and to bear her full part in interesting and entertaining others ; and she had a kind and affectionate heart, as well as a strong sense of all the duties of life. This was everything that he wanted, and though her fortune was very small, he paid no attention to that point. Though a very good-looking man, Mr. Charlton was nearly forty when he committed this act, and his days passed in uninterrupted tranquillity for about ten years, with wealth increasing, a happy home, a cheerful and amiable companion, and

one fair daughter, “ whom he loved passing well.”

But his felicity was to have a turn, and in one week he lost his brother, for whom he had always entertained a deep affection, and his wife, to whom he was bound by all the strongest bonds of the heart. The Baron of the Exchequer had never married, always declaring that he had no time; and consequently his wealth, which was considerable, devolved to his brother. But the disaster which Mr. Charlton had sustained affected him deeply; and, though he lingered on for about a year and a half in London, he was seized with a great distaste for business, and began to talk of retiring upon the ample means he possessed. Perhaps this design might have passed away had not the younger partners of the house overruled the elder, and entered into a speculation which seemed to the more prudent members of the firm extremely hazardous, and which proved somewhat detrimental, though to no very great extent. It acted, however, in deciding both the gentlemen who had opposed the scheme to retire, which they consequently did, and Mr. Charlton, after having sought through various parts of the country for a house to suit him, pitched his tent upon the top of the hill which, with its dependent village, I have already described.

He carried with him, into the country, his daughter, all his old servants, many of his old habits, his powdered hair, and his pigtail, though a renowned minister had nearly banished powder from society some years before, and royalty itself had set its face against all manner of queues.

His daughter was by this time about ten years of age, and had already received such an education from her mother as to ensure good foundation for whatever afterwards might be done to improve her mind. She had by inheritance her mother's heart and warm affections; and for two years after her arrival in the country, her father devoted himself entirely to cultivate her understanding, and give her right and just views of everything on which she might be called to exercise her judgment. I have already said that he was a man of strong good sense, and that quality went so far as to teach him his own prevailing fault, though not to correct it. Men of clear minds but of no great decision of character are generally given to analyze scrupulously their own feelings and motives—to examine, as with a microscope their own characters as objects which they can pause on and contemplate without fear or trouble. The result of their research may be right or wrong, according to their powers of intellect; but the investigation is still going

on, and has but this inconvenience, that from all which they discover in themselves, they are apt to judge of the conduct and motives of others. The bolder and firmer analyzer of the characters of those who surround him, escapes, perhaps, that error, but is likely to fall into the still greater one of not knowing himself.

Mr. Charlton, however, was of the former class ; and in turning his mind inward, like the eyes of the sages of Laputa, he saw and acknowledged that he had too strong an inclination to do many things which his judgment condemned, in order to save himself trouble and annoyance, and he strove diligently to impress his daughter's mind, to judge rightly at first, and to adhere to her decision when once it was formed. He did not fear to render her obstinate or headstrong by such lessons, for her character was naturally gentle and yielding, like that of her mother; and he also guarded it with all care, by showing the necessity of using every power of the mind to insure that the course we choose be the right one. Thus were formed within the bosom of Louisa Charlton certain principles of action which proved her safeguard at an after period, and the good sense of her father turned his very faults to her advantage.

Although the education of his child, the arrangement of his dwelling, the improvement of his

grounds, and the various amusements of country life, afforded Mr. Charlton some occupation, and at first filled up his time to his satisfaction, yet, after the first little bustle of the change was over, he began to feel lonely and listless. Two great wants were felt in his course of life, business and society. He had no companion—he had no constant employment. In London he had felt that every object which he saw around him recalled the memory of her he had lost; and though it was not forgetfulness he sought, it was to escape having painful remembrances continually forced upon him.

Now, however, he would often have given much to have recalled his hasty decision, for though grief subsided gradually, as it does somewhat too rapidly, indeed, with those who may be termed easy-minded people, he felt the want of the companionship to which he had been accustomed, and the employment which had become natural to him, more and more every hour. He might often be seen walking up and down the longest gravel walk in the garden, with his hands crossed behind him, and his eyes bent sadly upon the ground. Then he would roam out into the country, or take a quiet canter upon his round, short-legged horse, or drive out with his daughter to see some object of interest in the neighbour-

hood ; but still at his return he would fall again into listlessness.

The village afforded no society except that of the clergyman of the parish, the surgeon, and the lawyer. The former was an amiable, learned, and thoughtful man, doing all his duties well and zealously ; but, having long been accustomed to live almost totally without society himself, he had lost the taste for it, and spent his time either with his books, in the cottages of his inferior parishioners, or in dispensing justice, healing quarrels, and deciding differences, in his capacity as a magistrate. Thus, although he was always very happy to see Mr. Charlton, every now and then returned his visits, dined with him once or twice, and showing a strong prepossession in favour of his daughter, he did little to supply the place of all that the worthy gentleman had lost or given up.

The surgeon was still less serviceable in this respect ; he was a busy little man, clever in his profession, active, bustling, round, fat, and generally dressed in knee breeches and black silk stockings. He was always cheerful, especially when he could rub his hands, and say to a brother practitioner in the neighbourhood, “A pretty sprinkling of fever about Mr. Stubbs ;” but he was too busy, too small in mind, and too full of

rhubarb, magnesia, jalap, and calomel, to be any companion for a man of high intellect and wide information such as Mr. Charlton. He did, indeed, occasionally dissipate half an hour by bringing him the news of the neighbourhood, and sometimes more effectually interested him by introducing to his notice a case of distress, to which the heart and the purse of the worthy gentleman were always equally open.

The lawyer afforded still less sources of amusement or interest: he was a shrewd, clever, calculating, very silent man; each word that he uttered, and they were very few, was well weighed and pondered, although he had the reputation of occasionally helping his neighbours into disputes, from which it required his own assistance to deliver them; but, nevertheless, whatever he did in this way was well considered, and he seemed on all occasions to ask himself, before a sentence was suffered to pass his lips, whether it was actionable. With him Mr. Charlton was often obliged to act in matters of business, but their intercourse went no farther, though the lawyer was always profoundly civil to his wealthy neighbour.

Though there were several other persons, in various ranks of life, living at the distance of a few miles, some of whom I may have occasion to

introduce to the reader at an after period, these three formed the only society which the village of Mallington afforded, and the very retired and quiet situation, which had been its great attraction in the eyes of Mr. Charlton at first, now proved a source of discomfort to him.

It is not improbable, indeed, that, under these circumstances, he might, sooner or later, have returned to London, and, indeed, he was beginning to argue himself into a belief that the masters which he procured for his daughter from a large town, about seven miles distant, were not so good as could be desired, when an event occurred which changed the whole course of his ideas, and fixed him on the spot where he was. But I must not introduce an important character at the end of the chapter, and the one who is now about to appear well deserves a clear stage and no favour.

CHAPTER II.

IN walking up the village of Mallington, from the rectory towards the mansion which was called Mallington House, we forgot to notice the linen-draper's shop, kept by two maiden sisters, somewhat past their prime, but very respectable women in their way. They were, it is true, rather apt to inquire into and report the affairs of their neighbours; but this must not be attributed to them as any great sin, for, to say truth, the village afforded so few sources of amusement that, as they neither fished, shot, nor hunted, they had very little else to do during, at least, three quarters of their time. The Misses Martin, then, employed a portion of each day in settling the business of every one in the place, and as their tongues were somewhat feared, and they had the reputation of being wealthy, they were courted by their neighbours, invited to take tea at the surgeon's, and held a hand at cards with the solicitor. They were, how-

ever, thrifty people, notwithstanding the elevated position they held in the society of the place, served in their own shop, and let the first floor and part of the second, when any one seeking a pure and salubrious air came down to find it at Mallington.

One afternoon, then, about two o'clock, in the spring of the third year which Mr. Charlton spent in the country, a post-chaise drove into the village, and stopped at the little public-house—for it could not be called an inn—named the Bagpipes, which had been established from time immemorial at the end of the street nearest the rectory.

The Misses Martin went to the door of their shop and looked out; but they could discover nothing but that a lady in mourning and a boy of about thirteen got out of the vehicle, and entered the place of public entertainment. After they had paused for a minute to see what more, they returned into the shady retreat formed by cloths and printed calicoes, and were busily engaged in wondering who the strangers could be, when the lady and the boy walked with a slow and sauntering pace up the street, looking at the houses on each side of the way as they came.

“Lor, Mathilda!” cried the eldest Miss Martin, as she saw them pass, “perhaps they are looking for lodgings. Tell Sally to put up the bill.”

The youngest sister hastened to obey, and then passed out between two pieces of muslin to see the further proceedings of the visitors.

“I declare they have gone into Dixon’s,” she cried ; “the creature keeps her bill up always ; but I am sure they will never be contented with that nasty place.”

“If they are,” said Miss Martin, in the true philosophical spirit of a certain fox who once had to do with the fruit of the vine, “they would not suit us, that’s clear.”

In about a quarter of an hour, however, the strangers came down the hill again, looking about them as before, and, much to the satisfaction of the two ladies in the shop, they walked in as soon as they perceived the bill. Inquiries were made —the rooms to be let were looked at ; no haggling about the price took place, but some additional conveniences were required, and, especially, a fourth room for a servant. All was promised by the Misses Martin that the lady demanded, and the next day she and her son were safely installed in the apartments over the shop, with a private door *quite to themselves*. A prim and tidy girl was hired to wait upon them till the lady’s own servant could come down from London ; and several costly articles of dress, with a handsome dressing-case, fitted up with silver, a writing desk to corre-

spond, and numerous applications to know where certain luxuries and conveniences were to be procured, showing habits of expense, if not affluence, convinced the Misses Martin that they had obtained as their tenants a very respectable family indeed.

The lady herself did not look more than two or three and thirty, although she was dressed in the unbecoming garb of widowhood—not, indeed, in deep weeds, for her fine flaxen hair was shown, but in such garments as many a woman feels inclined to wear long after the customs of the country require her to bear about the external signs of her bereavement. She was a very pretty woman, moreover, with bright blue eyes, fine teeth, a good complexion, soft clear skin, a chin somewhat too prominent perhaps, a beautiful hand and arm, and as smart a foot and ankle as ever was seen. She was tall, and though not absolutely graceful—for real grace depends as much upon the mind as upon the body—yet she was well formed, plump, but not stout, with a very charming fall of the neck and shoulders, and a waist of a mere span. Her son was, as we have said, about twelve or thirteen years of age, with his mother's complexion and features; tall, strong, and active, but with something unpleasant in the expression of his face, which it was difficult to

account for. His forehead was, indeed, rather low, the back of the head large, and there was a wild rash expression about the eyes and mouth, which made the elder Miss Martin somewhat apprehensive for her tables and chairs. In every other respect he was a handsome, good-looking boy: and no sooner was he in the house than out again down to the stream, over the hill and through the lanes, leaving his mother to arrange their rooms to her own taste, and take the trouble of unpacking the numerous trunks and portmanteaux which had been crowded upon the chaise.

Though the lady herself seemed a little thoughtful as she proceeded with this task, Miss Mathilda Martin, who gave her every assistance in her power—to see what was contained in the packages—remarked that she could occasionally laugh with a gay and merry laugh, as if she had once been possessed with what is called, in vulgar parlance, the spirit of fun, and as if, moreover, that spirit had not yet entirely gone out of her. She acquired also, even earlier than her sister, various pieces of information of which she was desirous, and amongst them, the name that was engraved upon the boxes, which, as they had been carried up under the lady's own eye, she had not previously been able to discover. There it stared her in the face, every

trunk that was opened, "The Hon. Mrs. Latimer!" and with this grand intelligence she hurried down to inform her sister, as soon as she had satisfied her curiosity in other respects.

Now, had Mrs. Latimer lodged at Dixon's, and had the good mistress of the house ventured to attach Honourable to her name, the two Misses Martin would instantly have pronounced the lady an impostor, and asked, with a triumphant sneer, whether lords' daughters ever travelled without a single servant in yellow post-chaises, and had but one maid, who was left in London? But Mrs. Latimer was their own lodger; and that made a wonderful difference. She was for the time a part and parcel of themselves; and their importance, the very importance of their lodging, was vastly increased by the Hon. Mrs. Latimer lodging there. They looked forward into futurity; they thought of speaking, for many years, to all persons viewing the rooms of their last lodger, "the Hon. Mrs. Latimer;" they even saw a likelihood of mentioning her to their acquaintances, in more familiar conversation, as their friend "the Hon. Mrs. Latimer, who had been spending a few weeks with them."

The self-same night they told it to Mr. Nethersole and to their neighbours, right and left; and when, on the day but one after, the lady her-

self appeared at church, everybody was prepared to open the door of his pew to give her admission ; and all declared that she was a very beautiful creature, and looked “ quite the lady.” She was ushered, however, by the clerk into the rector’s pew, which, as he had no wife, and his sister was absent, generally stood vacant. Her demeanour was composed and decorous ; she looked little around her, except once, when a man in the gallery began to play upon a hautboy, beginning with a dismal squeak, to lead the congregation in singing ; and, to do them justice, they followed him exactly in the same tone. She then turned round with an expression of surprise, but speedily fixed her eyes upon her book with a grave look, and joined the rest, though with more music in her tones than the other members of the choir. Her son did not, indeed, preserve the same decent solemnity, but laughed aloud ; and, to say truth, through the whole service, displayed a sort of indifferent, careless inattention, which would have shocked the good clergyman not a little, but that luckily, both in the pulpit and the reading desk, his back was turned upon his own pew. The next seats, however, were those of Mr. Charlton and his daughter ; and the worthy gentleman remarked his young neighbour’s want of decorum with displeasure ; but as he walked up the hill

after church, he perceived, well satisfied, that the fair widow, who was just before him, spoke seriously and evidently in a monitory tone to her son, who, for his part, held down his head and said nothing.

About a week after this occurrence, in writing to a friend in London, Mr. Charlton added in a postscript the following words:—"We have had an addition lately to the society of our little village, which, indeed, it much needed: a widow lady, who styles herself, or whom the people where she lodges style, the Honourable Mrs. Latimer. I have fallen into a sort of acquaintance with her; but, before I enter into anything like what people in general call friendship, I would fain know who she is, and something more of her history. See if you can find out, in case you cannot tell me yourself."

An answer to the letter came in the course of a few days, and on this head the writer afforded full information. Mrs. Latimer, he said, if it was the same person he meant, was a young widow, formerly the wife of the Honourable Captain Latimer, who had been a gay reckless young fellow, and had terminated a career of thoughtless folly and extravagance, by shooting himself, one morning in his dressing-room about two years before.

"She is but poorly provided for, I believe,"

continued the writer, “ for his family disapproved of the match, as she was the daughter of a singing master; and though she has always conducted herself with perfect propriety, they do nothing for her, so that she only has the interest of a younger brother’s fortune, sadly shattered as he left it. Frederic Harvey, who has seen her, says she is a monstrous fine woman.”

All these particulars roused Mr. Charlton’s best feelings in her behalf. He pitied her deeply for the shock and distress which her husband’s rash conduct must have inflicted; he felt sympathy for her, and indignation at her husband’s family for the harshness with which they had treated a person who, placed in difficult circumstances, had always acted with perfect propriety; and he compassionated a lady who, probably accustomed to affluence, and even luxury, had been so suddenly reduced to very limited circumstances; and he admired her for the equanimity and right feeling with which she bore the reverse, and adapted her style of living to her means.

A passing bow or an occasional word was all that had yet taken place between Mr. Charlton and Mrs. Latimer, but he now walked down to call upon her, with the determination of showing her every attention in his power. The lady received him with grave politeness, thanked him

for his civility, and easily smoothed down the first roughnesses of new acquaintance. She talked well and sensibly upon various subjects ; never referred in the most remote degree to her own state and station, but spoke a good deal of Miss Charlton, and praised her beauty and grace of demeanour with discrimination and delicacy.

Mr. Charlton went away even better pleased with what he had seen than with what he had heard, felt convinced that the society of such a person would be of great advantage to his daughter, and, after some hesitation, determined to ask her to dinner, taking care to invite some of the distant neighbours, who had wives and daughters, to meet the fair widow at his house. To her he bore the important request in person, and prefaced it by some apology in regard to having no lady of the house to receive her.

Mrs. Latimer smiled somewhat sadly, replying, “ Oh, my dear sir, when people come to our time of life, and have seen many sorrows, though they may have lost many bright things with youth, yet they have gained freedom from those restraints which youth is wisely, though unwillingly, forced to impose upon itself.”

“ Our time of life, my dear madam !” said Mr. Charlton, shaking his head, “ you must not class yourself with the good old people yet.”

“ Oh ! I am older than I look,” replied the lady, “ and look, I am afraid, younger than I could wish. But to speak to your invitation, my dear sir. I really seldom go out. Indeed, I have not been anywhere since—since—for a long time, I mean.”

“ Nay, I will take no denial,” rejoined Mr. Charlton, kindly ; “ and your young gentleman must come up, and amuse himself as well as he can.”

“ You are very kind,” said Mrs. Latimer, thoughtfully ; “ but really—yet, for the boy’s sake, I must get rid of such feelings of reluctance.”

“ Certainly, my dear madam,” replied Mr. Charlton ; “ you have duties which must be performed, and it is far better not to suffer feelings, however natural—however laudable—to interfere with their execution at the commencement. I shall count upon you, then, and will now take my leave.”

The day of the dinner arrived. After some of the more distant guests had made their appearance, Mrs. Latimer was announced. She was dressed more plainly than usual ; her widow’s cap was brought further over her face ; her hair was less shown. She was grave, too, and seemed a little agitated ; but if such was the case, Mr.

Charlton's kindness and good breeding soon put her at her ease, and everybody showed her attention and civility, for her worthy host had communicated to those in the room what he had heard regarding the propriety of her conduct, and the sad circumstances in which she was placed. Before dinner, and after dinner, she showed great fondness for Miss Charlton ; talked with her, smiled upon her, and admired in her to her father all those things which Mr. Charlton himself most admired in his child.

In the course of the evening there was some music ; several of the young ladies were requested to sing ; and one of them, after having done so, inquired if Mrs. Latimer would not favour them in the same way. She answered that she never sang anything but sacred music now ; but she was prevailed upon to try a song from some favourite oratorio of the day, and nothing could be more beautiful than the manner in which she executed the task. It was chaste, high-toned, and sweet, without any effort or exuberant ornament, and every one listened, rapt and delighted till it was done, when a murmur of applause spread through the room.

From that day Mrs. Latimer became a great favourite in the neighbourhood, and several invitations to dinner immediately followed, but she

had chosen her course by this time, and replied, without concealment, that her means were too limited to admit of her going out far for society. In one or two instances, a kindly—though, perhaps, considering the shortness of the acquaintance, not a very delicate—spirit prompted the inviters to send their own carriages for her; and in these cases she accepted. She also went out to several other dinner parties to which Miss Charlton was invited, taking a place in Mr. Charlton's carriage; but her principal intimacy was at Mallington House, and circumstances soon arose to make her almost a daily visitor there, as I shall proceed to explain.

CHAPTER III.

It very often happened, during the month or two which followed, that Mr. Charlton, sometimes accompanied by his daughter, sometimes alone, dropped in for half an hour in the morning to see how Mrs. Latimer and her son were going on; and on more than one occasion the conversation turned upon the education of children, in regard to which the lady seemed to have thought deeply, though, to say the truth, her own offspring did not afford a favourable specimen of her practice. That circumstance, however, was easily and naturally explained by her one morning, when the boy was absent, "I have a hard task before me, my dear sir," she said, speaking of this subject. "Poor Alfred has been so terribly neglected, and so sadly spoiled, that the efforts to restrain him, and make him apply, are almost too much for me. I long foresaw what would be the result, and foresaw it with fear and trembling; but the

will of those who had the best right to speak was, of course, obeyed, and between contending duties I yielded to that which appeared paramount. I did not, indeed, think," she added in a low tone, "that I should be left alone to struggle with the faults encouraged by indulgence I could not counteract."

" Do you not think, my dear madam," asked Mr. Charlton, " that the best plan would be to send him to school?"

Mrs. Latimer shook her head with a rueful smile. " I cannot afford it," she said, in a low tone, and then added, a moment or two after, as her words had thrown her worthy visitor into a train of thought, " No, I must be contented to do what I can myself, and for the rest must trust to masters, when I can hear of any good ones."

" There are some very fair masters in the neighbourhood," replied Mr. Charlton. " With the exception of music, which he does not want, you will find all that you require. The music-master, indeed, is a very indifferent teacher, and I have, on more than one occasion, thought of going back to London again, in order to give Louisa better instruction."

Mrs. Latimer turned a shade paler, but the next moment she exclaimed, " Oh! Mr. Charlton, I have thought of something that will indeed be

delightful. You must let me be your daughter's music-mistress. It will at once be a great pleasure to me, and it will afford me the only means I ever shall have of showing you how deeply grateful I am for all the kindness you have evinced towards me."

Mr. Charlton hesitated and was embarrassed, said he could not think of Mrs. Latimer taking such trouble, and made a number of other apologies; but the lady persisted in her plan, and, as she had no piano at her lodging, it was agreed that she should come up every fine morning, to give Louisa Charlton some instruction. Louisa herself was delighted, and every day Mrs. Latimer became a greater favourite both with father and daughter. She was often a companion at their breakfast table; often stayed to dinner. Her son was frequently at Mallington House, and though by no means much approved of by Mr. Charlton, was tolerated for Mrs. Latimer's sake. She was the greatest resource to the worthy gentleman that could be imagined—his companion, his friend; and he was very well inclined that matters should go on in the same way to the close of his days, but Mrs. Latimer did not intend that it should be so.

When she had been about nine months in the place, Mr. Charlton observed, with real concern,

that she grew graver and more thoughtful than ever; that she seldom smiled, and when she did so it was faintly, and not from the heart. He inquired of himself what could be the matter, for some time before he inquired of any one else. But at length, one day, when he had, during a morning call upon her, remarked that she was more serious than ever, he asked her maid, who opened the door to give him exit—a calm, staid, shrewd-looking woman—if Mrs. Latimer were ill, observing that she looked out of spirits.

“Really, sir, I do not know what is the matter,” said the abigail. “I see clearly enough that my mistress is fretting about something, but I cannot tell you what it is. She has had sorrow enough, poor thing, for one so good and so beautiful.”

“Pray were you with her when her husband died, Mrs. Windsor?” asked Mr. Charlton.

“Ay, that I was, sir,” answered the maid, “and a terrible day, too. He was a wild, rash, violent man, and treated her ill enough. But still he was her husband, sir; and although as to loving him very much, that was not possible, yet the shock nearly killed her.”

“Well, pray, Mrs. Windsor,” rejoined Mr. Charlton, feeling that it would not be proper to push his inquiries any farther in that quarter,

“ if you find out that I can be of any service to Mrs. Latimer, let me know. You may be perfectly sure I should be delighted to render it.”

The maid promised to do so ; but nothing resulted from this conversation for some time, and Mrs. Latimer still continued grave and sad. At times, indeed, when walking on the common with Mr. Charlton, or sitting with him alone, a burst of happier feeling would take place. She would give way to some playful sally ; appeal to him upon some light matter of taste ; discuss the subject with him eagerly ; perhaps oppose his opinions at first, but, in the end, yielded invariably, and then would turn her fine blue eyes upon him, and exclaim, “ We women are not capable of arguing, my dear friend, and I believe we had better never attempt it.” Then, the moment after, she would fall into sad thought again, and at times her eyes would fill with tears.

At length one morning a note arrived from her, at the hour at which she usually appeared, excusing herself for not coming, on account of matters of business which would occupy her all day. A second day she excused herself, a third she had a cold ; and Mr. Charlton went down in person to inquire after her. At a little distance from her door he met her son Alfred, and, stop-

ping to shake hands with the boy, naturally expressed a hope that Mrs. Latimer was not seriously indisposed.

“ Oh ! mamma is well enough,” replied Alfred Latimer. “ She is only moping. She has been moping these three or four days ; but you must not tell her I said so, for she forbade me.”

Mr. Charlton went on and rang at her door, nor was he refused admittance. He found her seated reading, and, thinking it better to begin upon the subject that he had at heart at once, he said, “ My dear lady, I have remarked that you have been much out of spirits of late. Now you must not think me intrusive ; but, feeling the very sincere regard for you that I do, I may be permitted to say that, as you have no one here with whom to consult, if you require advice or assistance in any way, I should feel it a slight if you did not apply to me.”

Mrs. Latimer coloured, and seemed a good deal agitated ; but, after a moment’s pause, she pressed Mr. Charlton’s hand in her own, saying emphatically, “ Thank you ! thank you ! best and kindest of men. But, alas ! I fear that you can give me no assistance, and that your advice in this instance would but confirm the resolution which I have already taken, with bitter regret. Oh ! had I had your advice and support long, long

ago, how many sorrows might have been saved me!"

"Well, but take them now," said Mr. Charlton, "and first tell me, my dear madam, what this determination is?"

"I will," replied Mrs. Latimer, "but you must hear a word or two of preface. Married very young, partly at my father's persuasion, partly from the giddy thoughtlessness of youth, to a man of whom I shall only say that even then I should not have chosen him, had I had opportunity of selection, or time for thought, I endeavoured to do my duty well—indeed I did, Mr. Charlton; nay, more, I tried to make my duty pleasure. The rest I must pass in silence—the memory of the dead is sacred; but I have known little peace in life till I came down here. In this quiet place, and with your kind and beneficial society, I have enjoyed my first happy moments since girlhood; but, alas! now I must leave it."

Mr. Charlton started, as if she had struck him, so completely was the possibility of such an event absent from his thoughts. "But why, Mrs. Latimer? Why?" he exclaimed.

"Because," she replied, "and you will own the reason to be a good one—my means are not equal to living even in the moderate way in which I live here. I have shaped my expenditure by my

income ; but a sudden claim upon a part of the small property my husband left, having started up, even that poor income is diminished."

" Nay, but let me look into the claim on your behalf," said Mr. Charlton ; " it may not be fair —it may not be just."

" Yes, it is," replied the lady, " I have been forced to become a better woman of business than you give me credit for being. I went into all the details at once about a month ago ; I found that it was indubitable—though the lawyers said I might contest the validity of the documents—that the money had been received, and therefore I ordered it to be paid immediately. It is already done ; my income is reduced by so much ; and I have only to wait till I can receive a sufficient sum to pay a few little bills here, and then, I fear—I must—yes, indeed, I must leave you," and Mrs. Latimer burst into tears.

Mr. Charlton soothed her kindly and tenderly, and when she was somewhat more composed he said, " Indeed, this shocks and grieves me deeply ; and if you would but consider me really in the light which you have often said you do—namely, that of a friend, a sincere true friend—and make use of my purse as if it were your own, till this little storm be passed—"

" Mr. Charlton !" exclaimed Mrs. Latimer,

drawing herself back, as if greatly surprised, “ Impossible ! But no,” she added the next moment, “ I know you meant it kindly, graciously, nobly, as you do everything. But that is quite impossible. A woman cannot receive money but from a father, or a husband—nay, say not a word more on that score, or I shall think you do not respect me. As to the money, I care not for it. There are countries where I can live at a cheaper rate than here, and I am ready, willing, to live on bread and water—ay, to work for that bread, should need be; but to part with the only people who have been really kind to me—to quit the only spot where I have known tranquillity—is bitter indeed,” and Mrs. Latimer wept again.

What Mr. Charlton might have replied at that moment, had he not been interrupted, who can tell ? but just as he was about to answer, Alfred Latimer burst into the room, laughing at something he had seen or done in the village. The boy was surprised to see his mother in tears, and turned a look quickly, and almost fiercely, upon Mr. Charlton, as if he had been doing something to grieve her.

Mrs. Latimer, however, held out her fair hand to her friend, saying, “ Forgive me for thus giving way, and say no more upon the subject at present.

We will talk about it more hereafter, when I am calmer."

"Well, then, my dear lady," replied Mr. Charlton, "I shall take it for granted that you will not rashly act in this matter till we have spoken further."

"I will take your advice in all things," answered the lady; "where should I go for counsel if not to you, my best—I may, indeed, say—my only friend?"

When Mr. Charlton returned to his own house he found his mind much more perturbed than was ordinary with him, or at all agreeable. That Mrs. Latimer might quit Mallington had never entered his imagination. She had never hinted such an intention; she had seemed so happy, so contented with the place, that he had taken it for granted everything would go on just as it had gone on for an indefinite time, and the idea of losing her society, and being again reduced to the state of listless apathy in which he had been when she arrived, seemed to him a second widowhood. Yet what could he do to prevent such a result? She had reasonable grounds for her resolution; she was evidently resolved to receive no pecuniary assistance; and, though he might think her a little too scrupulous with so sincere a friend as himself, he honoured her scruples too much to

strive to shake them. The term second widowhood, which he had employed in his own thoughts, ran in his mind. He began to fancy that he should find his time still burdensome to him through life, unless he married again ; and the expression which Mrs. Latimer had herself used, saying, that a woman could only receive money from a father or a husband, was one of the first things that made him ask himself, if he did marry, who could he so well and wisely wed as herself ?

At first he wished that he were ten years younger, their ages, then, he thought, might not have been so out of proportion. As it was, people would only say that he had been caught by the eye, and laugh at the old gentleman for marrying the fair young widow. Yet, after all, he recollect ed that he was not so very aged as grief and want of occupation, and the dark views they had engendered, made him fancy. He was barely fifty-four ; Mrs. Latimer might be thirty-five, or thirty-six, for she had told him that she looked younger than she really was. There was a difference, certainly, of fifteen or sixteen years, but what of that ? There was many a more disproportionate match every day ; and, let the world say what it would, he was conscious that it was not for beauty, or any ephemeral advantage,

that he chose her, but merely for the sake of an amiable and pleasant companion, who had soothed his melancholy, and whose high qualities he knew.

Thus Mr. Charlton went on, diminishing some objections in his own eyes, and boldly meeting others with a flat negative, till dinner time ; and yet he was by no means satisfied, and still less decided. He thought of his former wife—of her he had loved with the fondest affection—who had been the sunshine of his home, the light of his steps, the pride, as well as the darling, of his heart ; and when he looked into his own bosom he found nothing like the same feelings there towards Mrs. Latimer that he had experienced towards her. True, it was not to be expected—true, perhaps, it was better not. This ought to be a marriage of reason, whereas the other had been a marriage of love. But then, again, he thought of his daughter ; and why or wherefore he could not tell, his heart misgave him. It was but a prejudice, he fancied. One heard so much of step-mothers, and perhaps they might occasionally act ill, but there must be exceptions—indeed, he had known them himself, and Mrs. Latimer already showed for Louisa almost the affection of a mother.

Yet he was not satisfied ; and at dinner he was

thoughtful, absent, almost fretful. Towards nine in the evening, as he was trying to turn his mind to other thoughts, with the prudent resolution of sleeping over the matter, and just when Louisa had retired to bed, one of his old servants announced to him that Mrs. Windsor, Mrs. Latimer's maid, desired to see him.

“ Show her in, show her in !” cried Mr. Charlton, in some agitation ; and when the abigail appeared he exclaimed, “ Good-evening, Mrs. Windsor, I hope your lady is not ill !”

“ No, sir,” replied the maid ; and then waiting till the door was closed, she added, “ but you told me, sir, to inform you if I found out what made my mistress so grave and sad, and as I discovered to-night I thought I would come up and tell you, especially as you are somewhat concerned, sir.”

“ Indeed !” exclaimed Mr. Charlton, in some surprise ; “ how is that, Mrs. Windsor ?”

“ Why, sir,” answered his companion, pausing and thinking for a moment, with a grave and embarrassed look, “ it is an unpleasant thing to tell, but yet, as I was saying, I think it is but right that you should know, for I am sure you, who are quite the master of the place, as I may say, will soon put a stop to it.”

“ If it be anything unpleasant to your mistress, and I have power to do so,” replied Mr.

Charlton, "I certainly will; but what is it, Mrs. Windsor?"

"Why, sir, it is just this," the maid proceeded, after another hesitating pause—"those two old cats at whose house we lodge, the Miss Martins, are the greatest gossips and scandal-makers in the world, and they can't even keep their tongues off Mrs. Latimer, who never had a word said against her in her life."

"Indeed!" cried Mr. Charlton, with a tremulous emotion of the lip, "and pray what can they find to say against her now?"

"Truly, they must needs talk about your coming so often to see her, sir," rejoined Mrs. Windsor, as if with an effort, "and about her coming up here to Miss Charlton, sir—that's what they say; and I have found out that three or four days ago that old tabby, the eldest one, had the face to go up to my lady and speak to her about it, and to say it was not respectable."

"She did, did she!" exclaimed Mr. Charlton, his cheek growing very hot, "well, my good lady, I will soon settle that business!"

"They are cunning old creatures," continued the maid, with a scornful smile, "for they never said a word till they thought Mrs. Latimer was going to leave them, and then they chose to begin. However, sir, I thought it right to let you know,

for I never like any one to be spoken ill of behind his back, and to have things put upon him that he never dreamt of—especially a gentleman so kind and good to every one as you are."

" You did very right, Mrs. Windsor," replied Mr. Charlton, " there 's a guinea for you. Do not say anything to Mrs. Latimer about your having seen me. I suppose she did not know you were coming here?"

" Oh ! yes, sir," said the maid, " she had told me to take a note to Miss Charlton, which I have given to your man ; but she did not know that I was going to speak with you, and for Heaven's sake, don't tell her, sir. She would be so angry."

" No, no, make yourself easy, Mrs. Windsor," replied Mr. Charlton, " I will not betray you ; but I will find means to put a stop to their idle gossip, depend upon it, and now good-night. I shall call down before luncheon to-morrow."

Thus they parted, and Mr. Charlton walked up and down the room for at least half an hour. A new and powerful motive was given to him for doing as he wished to do ; nay, it was better than a motive—it was an excuse. Mrs. Latimer's reputation was affected by his friendship for her : there was no means of remedying that evil but one, and Mr. Charlton from that moment determined to put it in her power at least to do so.

He was somewhat anxious and nervous upon the subject, indeed. She might take a different view of the matter—she might look upon the difference of age as an insurmountable bar. She might like him very well as a friend, but not think of him as a husband. Yet, when he had retired to rest, and thought over a thousand little traits which he had perceived, he began to hope that he was not altogether so indifferent to her. That she had a great regard for him was evident ; that to abandon his society was painful to her she had acknowledged ; and he remembered more than once having caught her eyes fixed upon his face with an expression of interest. He was conscious that he was a good-looking man of his age, and now he began to wish that he had not continued to wear powder and a pigtail. That, however, could not now be helped, for he would not venture upon the ridicule of cutting off the latter encumbrance upon the eve of a declaration, and, thinking that a sleepless night would not improve his personal appearance, he turned upon his side and courted the drowsy god. As usual, in such cases, the god was somewhat slow to come, and Mr. Charlton was up early the next morning refreshing himself with a walk in the garden. At breakfast his daughter sat opposite to him, and entertained him with her young conversation ; but every

time his eyes turned upon her his heart smote him. However, his resolution was taken, and about eleven away he went to execute it.

He found the fair widow looking, he thought, more fascinating than ever, and, luckily for his purpose, alone. Her eyes beamed when she saw him; and she held out her soft delicate hand with a smile so enchanting that Mr. Charlton began to feel emotions of tenderness which carried him on wonderfully after a while, though they interrupted him a little at first.

“You seem busy, my dear Mrs. Latimer,” he said, looking at her writing-desk, which was open before her, and at the table covered with papers. “I hope I do not disturb you; but even if I do I must still intrude a little, for I have one or two things to say.”

“I was only putting my desk into order for a journey,” said Mrs. Latimer, with the smile passing away, and giving place to a look of sadness; “for I see, my excellent friend, it must come to that.”

“Nay, I think not,” replied Mr. Charlton, seating himself beside her on the little hard-stuffed rose-wood sofa of the lodging. “I think not,” he repeated, “unless, indeed, you be very resolute to go. There is such a thing, my dear lady, as a choice of evils in this world, and I am going to

put such an alternative before you. You have expressed great unwillingness to go from Mallington, and I believe you to be quite sincere, for where one is loved and esteemed, there one generally finds some sort of pleasure. You have, also, been kind enough to say that the loss of my daughter's and my own society had no slight part in causing your unwillingness."

"A part, my kind friend, so great, that the alternative you propose would be a very painful one indeed if I did not choose it to avoid such grief. For yourself, I can only say that you have acted towards me a part that has ever made me look upon you as an elder brother."

"Well, my dear madam," said Mr. Charlton, "I tell you the alternative is but one of two evils: it is for you to judge which is the greater. I wish you, then to stay at Mallington—to change your present residence, and to come to mine."

Mrs. Latimer looked all amazement; but Mr. Charlton proceeded with more calmness than he had himself expected—"This, my sweet friend, can but be done at the expense of a great sacrifice. To render it right—to render it possible, I may say—you must consent to give your hand to a man much older than yourself, and to make him happy at the expense, perhaps, of some regrets."

Mrs. Latimer pressed her hand upon her heart

as if its beating were too much for her ; and then, bending down her head, she hid her eyes in her handkerchief and wept.

“ Nay, nay,” said Mr. Charlton, taking her hand somewhat alarmed, “ I did not intend to grieve you.”

“ Grieve me ! grieve me !” cried Mrs. Latimer, raising her beautiful eyes swimming with tears, but with a smile upon her lips. “ Oh ! my noble and generous friend, you know not what I feel ;” and she placed her other hand in his also. “ But I cannot suffer you,” she said, after a start. “ No ! I cannot suffer you to make such a sacrifice yourself. You know that I am poor ; but you do not know how poor, my good friend. Debts I have none, but at this moment I have less than one hundred per annum. You can, you ought to look for a wife far better endowed than I am. Still in the prime of life, with large fortune, and everything to make a woman happy you have every right to expect—”

“ Hush, hush, hush !” said Mr. Charlton, interrupting her, “ I will not hear another word upon such subjects. If you can feel that you will be happy with me, if you will be a mother to my daughter and a companion to myself, the journey from Mallington is at an end.”

“ For ever !” said Mrs. Latimer, leaning her

head upon his shoulder, “ Oh !” she murmured in a soft tone, “ Oh ! that I had known you earlier in life, as I said the other day, what misery it would have saved me. But how rarely is it that one meets in early years the only person who can make one happy.”

We have, however, intruded somewhat too far upon scenes that are generally private, and we must therefore leave Mrs. Latimer and Mr. Charlton alone to settle all about the marriage without our presence. We have not been the only ones, however, dear readers, who overheard that tender conversation. Ah, no ! Miss Mathilda Martin, having first ascertained that Mrs. Windsor had gone out as soon as she had let Mr. Charlton in, was upon the stairs close to the door —so close, indeed, that sometimes her ear, sometimes her eye very nearly touched the keyhole. So it was, however, that after a certain time Miss Mathilda descended to the shop, with a cheek highly coloured, and an eye full of excitement. “ Oh ! yes, indeed,” she said to her sister, “ it is just so ! quite as we thought. Don’t say a word, Winifred. I heard it with my own ears. He is now going to forget all decency and to keep her up at his own house. I heard him, I can assure you. He said these very words, ‘ I wish you

to stay at Mallington—to change your present residence, and come to mine.'"

"And what did she say?" cried Miss Martin, eagerly. "Will she go?"

"Oh, to be sure!" replied Mathilda; "no doubt of it. There were plenty of 'dear friends' and 'sweet friends' going, I can assure you. Ah! the nasty old man, how I hate him!"

"She's the worst of the two," answered her sister; "a trumpery minx, with her high airs. Why, she has never once asked us to take a cup of tea; as if we were dirt. I should not wonder if she were no widow at all, but just some cast off, with her boy."

Mrs. Latimer was evidently lost in the opinion of the two Misses Martin; and after having thus discussed the mistress they proceeded to assail the maid. Of her they said what was true enough, that she was an artful jade; for though they had not exactly hit upon Mrs. Latimer's real faults, she being, perhaps, the last person on earth to be misled by any man, young or old, yet their closer observation of good Mrs. Windsor had given them a good insight into her character. As they were in progress, however, they were suddenly interrupted by the entrance of good Dr. Western, the rector, who, after ordering a few articles of

clothing for some of his poor, went on to ask if Mrs. Latimer was at home.

"Oh dear, yes, sir," said Miss Martin, "she has got Mr. Charlton with her, as usual, sir."

"She is soon going to quit, however," added Mathilda, "and I cannot say I am sorry."

"Indeed!" exclaimed the clergyman, with considerable surprise, "may I ask why? Mrs. Latimer is a very respectable person, though not rich, and I trust that you have too much good sense and good feeling, Miss Martin, to value any one merely as they may be wealthy."

"Ay, but is she so respectable, doctor?" asked Miss Martin, with a significant look.

"I have the best assurance that she is so," replied Dr. Western. "I will add something more, my good lady. Knowing the propensity of all small places to deal uncharitably with the characters of strangers, and having last week heard something that did not please me of reports set about respecting this lady, I took the trouble of writing for information, and find, as I supposed, that those reports are without foundation, and that she is in every respect what she seems; in a word, one who has acted through life with perfect propriety, even though placed in very painful and difficult situations. I trust, therefore,

that we shall hear no more of this, for it is neither christian nor generous."

Dr. Western, who had purposely given the Misses Martin an opportunity of drawing this reproof upon their own heads, then proceeded to pay his intended visit to Mrs. Latimer ; and it was remarked by the ladies of the shop that he and Mr. Charlton walked out, and proceeded down the street together.

A vague rumour, in the course of the subsequent week, spread through the village that Mrs. Latimer was not long to be Mrs. Latimer. Louisa Charlton or Mr. Charlton were always with her ; the carriages of neighbouring gentry were frequently at her door ; sempstresses and dress-makers were busily employed ; and the Misses Martin, beginning to find that they had made a very great mistake, were her most humble servants, fawning egregiously on even Mrs. Windsor, and declaring that " Dear Mrs. Latimer was certainly one of the sweetest creatures that ever was seen."

Dear Mrs. Latimer, however, did not forget them ; she was perfectly civil, indeed ; but she bided her time.

At length, one Saturday night an elderly gentleman, who was reported to be an army agent, came down to Mallington, spent the evening with

Mrs. Latimer and Mr. Charlton, and took a bed at the house of the latter. The next day the lady appeared at church divested of her weeds ; and on the Tuesday following, at an early hour, the widower and the widow stood together before the altar, to be made man and wife. The army agent, who had been a friend of her former husband, acted as father upon the present occasion ; a small party of the country neighbours were witnesses to the ceremony. Louisa Charlton and Alfred Latimer were invited to spend a few days with a friend who lived about seven miles from Mallington, and Mr. Charlton and his fair bride set out upon a tour into Warwickshire.

CHAPTER IV.

CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS was a great discoverer, as the reader is undoubtedly aware ; but he never made half the discoveries that Mr. Charlton did within one year from the time that Mrs. Latimer gave him her hand at the altar. Not that she behaved ill to him ; for, on the contrary, she redoubled her affectionate manner ; exerted herself to be more enchanting than ever ; soothed, flattered, fondled him. But Mr. Charlton had now nearer means of observation, and he was naturally a clear-sighted man. He was as fond of her as ever—he would not have lost her society for the world ; but he was neither old enough nor young enough to be blind to all the little traits of character which presented themselves in his fair wife ; and all these traits tended to show that Mrs. Charlton was one of those ladies who never act without an object. She calculated her game with the most precise and definite computation, and

worked boldly towards the result which she wished to arrive at by the means she thought most likely to attain it. From her earliest years she had been taught to consider her own interests in the first place, and had willingly seconded her father in ensnaring the son of a noble family into a connexion which all his friends disapproved. His first object was to seduce her, but though not without strong passions, they were not of that character which were likely to make her fall a sacrifice to the designs of any man. She could hate heartily, but love was not one of her weaknesses ; and thus she skilfully led him on to make her his wife as the only means of possessing her. His fortune, never very great, she aided to impair, for she had tastes and habits as expensive as his own ; and as he was of a violent and irritable disposition, and she had no object in soothing him, the coldness with which she listened to the details of his difficulties, and the little care she displayed in extricating him from them, often drove him into fits of passion, which produced scenes that caused all but very close observers to pity the sweet creature his wife very much. She had an admirable art, too, of always putting him in the wrong, and as she was certainly ill-treated—for he was known more than once to strike her—and as she resisted, without any effort, many an

attempt to seduce her from the right path, made by that husband's dissolute associates, the world in general gave her credit for forbearance only equal to her virtue. Thus had passed her younger days, till, at length, in a fit of rage and despair, Captain Latimer lost the use of his reason, and raised his hand against his own life.

Mrs. Latimer had then, as we have seen, set up the interesting young widow, and had visited various parts of England in that capacity before she touched upon Mallington. At the latter place, she only proposed at first to look about her for a month ; and finding there a clergyman apparently well to do, and a single man, her first thought was that, perhaps, in course of time, she might become Mrs. Western. Perceiving very soon, however, that Dr. Western was not very accessible, and learning that the large house at the top of the hill belonged to a widower of great wealth, she determined to change her plan, inasmuch as a campaign against the heart of Mr. Charlton seemed open to more easy tactics, and because the object to be gained was greater. Affluence and ease, carriages, horses, servants, were things that Mrs. Latimer liked very much, and it was well worth a little study and art to obtain such advantages. The disposition of Mr. Charlton was easily read—Mrs. Latimer shaped

her conduct accordingly ; her maid, Mrs. Windsor, without any full explanation being necessary between mistress and servant, seconded her skilfully, and the result has been already seen by the reader.

It is an invariable rule, however, which often tends to bring down retribution on the head of deceivers, that we undervalue the good sense of people whom we have once taken in. Never cheat any one, dear reader ; for depend upon it you will think him a fool ever after, till perchance he cheats you in return. Now, Mrs. Latimer, or, as we must henceforth call her, Mrs. Charlton, did undervalue the good sense of her second husband. She only recollects the result, that she had deceived him into thinking her all he wished, and she forgot the art she had displayed in making him think so. She forgot, also, that she was now placed before his eyes in the microscope of matrimony, and she did not exactly guard all her sayings and doings with that scrupulous care which would have been necessary to keep up the illusion. One great object was gained—she was his wife—and she thought she might have a little repose. She had another great object, it is true : to induce him to leave her at his death a large share of his fortune ; but she trusted to habit and natural tenderness, and her own skill in pleas-

ing, to obtain that very satisfactory result. Mr. Charlton had, indeed, settled upon her, previous to their marriage, an annual sum sufficient for her maintenance as his widow, in case of his decease, but Mrs. Latimer had, on various accounts, not exacted as large a jointure as, perhaps, she might have obtained had she, to use an angler's term, "played her fish" after she had hooked him. But two causes prevented her doing so: in the first place, the character she had assumed, and which it was necessary to keep up, was repugnant to such a course; and in the next, she was naturally of an impatient disposition, and eager to enjoy the fair prospect before her. Thus, though she delicately hinted to her friend the army agent that some settlement might be necessary, yet she left the matter entirely in his hands; and he, for his part, thought the proposal of Mr. Charlton on that score very liberal.

After a bridal tour of somewhat more than a month Mr. and Mrs. Charlton returned to Mallington House; and the lady's taste for expense and display began to show itself. Her husband, however, did not object; he could well afford it, and, indeed, had somewhat reproached himself in days gone by with living too far within his income, solely from not knowing how to spend it reasonably. His former wife had no

such habits indeed, and the contrast struck him not altogether pleasantly ; but he said nothing, and only insured that his expenses should be kept within due bounds. Then Mrs. Charlton thought it right to see the trade of the village improved by the establishment of a rival shop, in opposition to the Misses Martin. Encouragement was given to a speculative tradesman of the neighbouring town to break in upon the monopoly so long enjoyed by those ladies, and as he had all Mrs. Charlton's custom, and her strongest recommendation, besides smart new articles, which had never been seen in Mallington before, the old shop was soon neglected, the dull-coloured prints and muslins hung unpurchased in the windows, and the Misses Martin, growing every day sourer and more sour, rued the hour when they had put up the bill of lodgings which had caught the widow's eye, and mentally gave her over to ruin and condemnation.

Neither of this did Mr. Charlton wholly approve, but his fair wife took care to conceal the animus of this proceeding from his eyes, and he was, therefore, obliged to content himself with her notions of free trade and anti-monopoly. One thing, however, did annoy him ; he had forgotten that, in marrying the widow, he ran a great risk of marrying her son too, and Alfred

Latimer soon gave him cause to repent of having done so. He proved a wild, capricious, rash, unfeeling boy, and it became evident, very speedily, that his spoiling had not been entirely on his father's part. He was very ignorant, very arrogant; and with none of those principles which, implanted in very early youth, prove sooner or later the correctors of follies and the tamers of passions, he seemed to have no idea of anything but indulgence and amusement.

After having given way for about six months, Mr. Charlton, moved by a sense of duty to the boy himself, shook off his desire of ease and tranquillity, and represented to his wife the absolute necessity of sending him to school. He proposed Eton, and offered to provide liberally for his expenses there, saying, that of course he looked upon her son nearly in the light of his own. But Mrs. Charlton was in despair at the idea; she showed in feeling terms that he had been so long brought up at home, that the change to a public school would be more severe and trying to him than to other lads; and all that her husband could obtain by his most reasonable arguments was, that he should be sent to a private school some fifteen miles off, where she might be at hand herself to watch over him.

Not long after this Mrs. Charlton hinted to

her husband that it might be better if their dear Louisa were sent to a finishing school in London. She suggested that it would give a polish to her manners, a tone, a style to her appearance and demeanour that never could be acquired in country society ; that all the accomplishments which she possessed wanted the perfecting touch of the first masters, and that it was good for all young people to see a little of the world before they had to play an active part in it.

Mr. Charlton heard her to an end with perfect composure, but then replied gravely, but not unkindly, “ No, my dear. She never sets her foot in a school.”

He said no more at first, and Mrs. Charlton was inclined to argue the point ; but he stopped her abruptly, adding, “ Her mother never was at a school ; she had a great abhorrence of them. I promised her that Louisa never should be sent to one, and that promise I will keep.”

Mrs. Charlton burst into tears, and Mr. Charlton quitted the room.

She found that she had injured herself, however ; and hastened to retrieve her false move by renewed kindness to her step-daughter, towards whom, to say sooth, she had somewhat cooled since her marriage ; but she did not love Louisa the more for being the subject of her first dispute

with her husband. In manner she was sweet and gentle to Louisa Charlton, always calling her either my love, or my dear Louisa ; but there were many small traits which showed to Louisa herself, and, what was of still greater importance, to Mr. Charlton also, that there was little sincere affection. Often in a kindly tone, and with numerous professions of regard and assurances that she did it for the child's own good, she would reprove Louisa for one little act or another, and lecture her upon her conduct and demeanour. She affected to think that it was her duty to do so, and therefore did it before her husband ; but Mr. Charlton was very keen-sighted in regard to his child, and the first question which he asked himself was, whether the censure was just, before he inquired whether his new wife was only actuated by a sense of duty or by some other motive. He generally found reason to think that Louisa was in the right ; for though she made no defence, yet she had an advocate in her father's heart, and a judge in his sense of justice which did her right, contrary to Mrs. Charlton's expectations. That lady, indeed, only strove to produce an unfavourable impression on her husband of his daughter's conduct and character ; but she was not at all aware that Mr. Charlton was silently, and, in his own mind,

trying them both, and generally giving judgment against her. She did not at all understand at first, and, indeed, never fully understood, the exact nature of his love of quiet and his abhorrence of discussions. She often thought that she had gained her point, and produced the result she intended, because he said nothing. She fancied he did not see and comprehend, because he did not oppose or reprove; but, in truth, Mr. Charlton was always analyzing and forming his estimate by the accumulation of facts which he observed. Thus, on one or two occasions when his quietness had induced Mrs. Charlton to go on to a point where he felt it his duty to oppose decidedly what he thought wrong, and some little dispute took place in consequence, Mrs. Charlton believed that it would all be soon forgotten; but she deceived herself. It was a new page written in her history—a fresh line in the portrait which her husband was constantly drawing in his own mind.

Sometimes, too, in spite of all her skill and self-command, the strong and violent passions which were in her bosom would burst forth with a vindictive fire, which startled and alarmed her husband. Thus, one day, about a year after their marriage, her son was brought in by the head gardener (who had often complained of the

destruction he committed in the garden) for a more unpardonable offence. The man appeared in the hall, where the young gentleman's mother was then standing, holding him firmly by the collar, notwithstanding his kicking, struggling, and biting ; and he at once informed the lady that Master Alfred had that moment destroyed the whole melon beds, and broken the glasses of the frames, in revenge for having been prevented from knocking off the blossoms of a fruit-tree with a switch. The man spoke calmly and respectfully ; but the boy, furious with passion, accused him of striking and maltreating him, and soon made his mother a participator in his anger. The idea of her son dragged in by the collar by a simple gardener, was enough to excite her indignation ; and ordering the man to quit his hold immediately, without making any answer to his complaint, she took her son by the hand, and, with raised colour and flashing eyes, sought Mr. Charlton in the library. Trying to subdue her voice to some degree of calmness, she demanded that Blackmore, the gardener, should be immediately dismissed, for daring to strike poor Alfred for some of his little follies in the garden ; and she proceeded to make out as aggravated a case against the man as possible.

Mr. Charlton heard her calmly, but with his

eye resting more firmly on her flushed check than was pleasant to her, and then called the boy to him, saying, “Come hither, Alfred, and tell me how all this has happened. But, before you speak, remember I must have the exact truth, which, I am sorry to say, you do not always give. Now, what occurred between you and Blackmore?”

The boy went on, detailed the circumstances according to his own version, admitted with apparent frankness that he had been switching the blossoms on the wall, but declared that the man had taken the stick from him, and struck him with it, and that it was in running away from him that he had jumped upon the melon beds and broken the frames. The story was not well arranged, for a very short investigation would have shown that three frames had been destroyed, with all the wanton fury of passion; but Mr. Charlton made no investigation, and remained silent for a minute after the boy’s tale, broken by tears of rage, had come to an end.

“Well, my dear,” cried Mrs. Charlton, impatiently, “have I not a right to demand that he be discharged immediately?”

“No, Emily;” replied Mr. Charlton; “he cannot be discharged.”

“ And pray why not, Mr. Charlton ? ” asked his wife.

“ Because, my dear,” was the answer, “ Alfred has told a most gross and shameful falsehood. I was standing at that window at the time, and saw the whole affair. If you will follow my advice, you will send Alfred back to school this very day, as a punishment for the lie he has told, and the bad spirit he has displayed. As to discharging Blackmore, for simply doing his duty, that is out of the question.”

Mrs. Charlton made no answer, but it was a terrible struggle between prudence and passion. She burst into tears, however, and, taking her son by the hand, quitted the room. There was another line drawn in her picture ; and a darker one still was to come. Blackmore remained for about two months more in the service of his old master, and then gave warning. Mr. Charlton asked no explanation, and the man offered none ; but the former was well aware that the place had been made too uncomfortable for the man to remain in it.

Although Louisa Charlton had not sufficient knowledge of the human heart to analyze and examine as her father did, yet she *felt* the character of her step-mother, if I may use the term. She knew that she was not loved by her, and that

her tenderest tones and sweetest terms were not real. She avoided her as much as possible, then, and Mrs. Charlton was very glad of it; for she was somewhat too apparently anxious to be free from Louisa's society. If she were going out to drive or to walk she always contrived to believe that "the dear child" was busy about something—that she had this to study, or that to do. But Mr. Charlton, in his quiet way, soon put a moral restraint upon her in these respects. When such excuses for not taking his daughter were made, he remained at home, saying he would wait till she had done and then walk with her. This was a course which his fair wife did not at all approve of, as by that means the daughter became her husband's companion, not herself; and when she found that it was systematically pursued, she altered her conduct, not without some apprehension of having made another false move.

Louisa was always gentle, and kind, and affectionate, and treated her father's wife with perfect respect; but even that Mrs. Charlton did not like, for she would fain have discovered something substantial to find fault with. As the sweet girl grew up, however, and displayed promises of great beauty, Mrs. Charlton thought of a change of plans; and in her own mind laid out a scheme for uniting Louisa to her son—thus securing

possession of the whole of Mr. Charlton's wealth. The great obstacle, indeed, was the boy's own disposition, of which she well knew neither father nor daughter approved; and from that moment she strove eagerly with the lad—not to make him amend, but rather conceal his faults. Advice, exhortations, reproaches, were all employed in vain, and her own indulgence tended to frustrate her object. Each day as he advanced in life, Alfred Latimer showed himself more headstrong and wild, and a taste for low society began to display itself when at home; for the quiet cheerfulness of Mr. Charlton, and even the gayer gentleness of Louisa, were not at all to his taste. Towards the latter, indeed, he showed some affection of a particular kind; but even after they had become the young man and the young woman it never assumed the character of love. It was, in a degree that of a brother for a sister, by which name he always called her, in spite of all Mrs. Charlton could say; but it was less strong, less elevated. At times he would be angry and sullen with her for days together; at others would forget her entirely in his own pursuits; at others would tease and give her pain. But whenever he was in trouble or distress, he would fly to her, even in preference to his mother; and often, by her advice, assistance, or intercession, she would extricate him

from the difficulties that his own faults and follies had brought upon him. Louisa approved neither his character nor his conduct; she disliked his society; she shrank from his conversation, except when he sought her for counsel or aid; and the more she saw of him, the more unworthy she thought him, till she learned at length to regard him with something like fear, though it was more fear for himself, and for the follies and evils he might commit, than for the annoyance he might bring upon her.

I have said above that Mrs. Charlton was not pleased at his giving Louisa the name of sister; and the reason was, that she wished to bring Mr. Charlton and Louisa herself to look upon him in a very different light. She strove for this object steadily, shutting her eyes to all the many motives which could make her husband reject such a son-in-law. She endeavoured to persuade him that all Alfred's faults would pass away in time, that they were but errors of youth, and over-indulgence; and she attempted to rouse pride in favour of the alliance she had in view, by casually speaking, at different times, of the probability—which she represented as great—of her son succeeding to the title and estates of his cousin, whom she declared to be a sickly and feeble youth, not likely to see maturity.

Mr. Charlton had by this time gained deep insights, and he heard her without any marked reply, waiting to discover her object; for he now knew that she always had one. At length one evening, when Louisa had gone to bed, and she and her husband were sitting alone, Mrs. Charlton, as he seemed in a cheerful and yielding humour, ventured to say, "I know not what you feel, my dear; but if I could see my poor boy united to a woman who would guide him aright; and, by occupying all his affections, give him those high objects which I am sure are all that is wanting to correct his errors, I should think the great end of life attained."

"I fear such a one would be difficult to find, Emily," replied Mr. Charlton; "and for her sake, poor thing, if ever he is destined to meet with such a one, it would be better to let his passions be broken by the hard struggle of the world, or tamed by their own excess."

"Such a one is our dear Louisa," said Mrs. Charlton, in a hesitating tone.

"She is certainly one to make any man happy," replied her father, gravely, "but she is out of the question, and her like is not easily found."

"But why is she out of the question?" asked Mrs. Charlton, a little irritated. "Suppose they loved each other?"

“ That cannot be supposed,” said Mr. Charlton. “ They are brother and sister, indeed, and may love each other as such, but my curse would follow any other tie between them.”

He spoke in a tone that the lady had never heard him use before, and, as he did so, he rose as if to put an end to the conversation.

The next morning her husband was up somewhat earlier than usual, and went down into the village before breakfast. He had not been long gone, however, before one of the lawyer’s clerks came up to ask for a memorandum book which Mr. Charlton had left in his library. The servant could not find it, and applied to his mistress, who was now making breakfast. At first she told Louisa to go and look, but the moment after a sudden thought seemed to strike her, and she exclaimed “ No ; I know where it is. I will go.”

She did, and found the book ; but before she gave it to the man, who was waiting, she unclasped it, and looked at the first page as if to see that it was the right one. Her eye instantly lighted upon the words “ Mem. for Will :—If, contrary to my express commands, Louisa should by any chance marry A. L., everything to go to next heir.”

Mrs. Charlton restrained herself with pain while she handed the book to the man, but the moment he was gone she gave way to a burst of inde-

scribable rage. Her pretty features assumed the expression of a demon; and, in her wrath, she threw off the table, and broke to pieces, an ink-stand which she knew her husband valued greatly;—it had belonged to his first wife. When she returned to the breakfast-room she was still under the influence of the same feelings: she scolded the servants, she spoke angrily to Louisa, she fell into fits of sombre thought; but the moment Mr. Charlton's step sounded in the hall she was changed as if by enchantment. Her sweet smile came back like sunshine returning to a stormy sky, and she was all grace and gentleness when he seated himself at the breakfast-table.

She saw that her object was hopeless from that moment, however; and all that remained was to secure herself as large a share of Mr. Charlton's property as possible. For that purpose she redoubled all her efforts; and the next three or four years passed in very skilful, but very ineffectual, manœuvres. Mr. Charlton's eyes were open, and he was not to be deceived any more. He well knew that to secure peace and tranquillity, and to induce his wife to behave with tenderness to his child, it was necessary to appear blind to everything but any unkindness towards her; and he did appear so. Mrs. Charlton soon found that to show harshness or even coldness to Louisa was to

injure herself; and therefore, before her husband, she was as gentle as a lamb, though often, at other moments, she ventured upon an insinuation or a taunt which wounded deeply a heart very susceptible of, and accustomed to, kindness. Louisa complained not, for she knew that to do so would be to embitter the life of her father: but neither in this was Mr. Charlton blinded; for he often remarked, when he joined his wife and daughter, that the latter was very grave, and he attributed a mood not natural to her to its right cause.

To escape from conversation that was painful to her, and from thoughts that were painful also, Louisa Charlton often would walk down to the rectory, where good Dr. Western, and a widowed sister, of nearly his own age, who now lived with him, offered her society, if not cheerful, serene—and if not amusing, instructive. She joined in all their works of charity towards the poor of the neighbourhood, and contributed with a liberal hand to relieve many a case of urgent and unmerited distress; for she was nearly eighteen years of age, and her father took care that an allowance, proportioned to the fortune she was to inherit, should be placed at her own disposal. Mrs. Charlton was always glad to see her go; and generally, when a reason was thus afforded for not taking her with them, hurried Mr. Charlton

to distant visits, or to parties of pleasure, which did not always agree very well with his somewhat failing health. He was now above sixty years of age, and his original strong constitution and regular habits might have seemed to promise a green old age; but there was something preyed upon him. Perhaps it was regret, not unmixed with self-reproach; and if so, it was natural that the restraint he put upon his own feelings, to prevent their ever appearing in the eyes of either his wife or daughter, should aggravate the sufferings inflicted by a consciousness of having acted weakly.

Alfred Latimer was now frequently absent; for Mrs. Charlton had found it necessary, for the success of her own plans, to prevent the follies and vices, which were becoming more conspicuous as he grew towards manhood, from being obtruded upon the eyes of her husband; and he had been placed under the care of a clergyman at some distance to prepare him for college. But his stay there did not tend, in any great degree, to improve his disposition; for the tutor was an indolent man, with whom he might study if he pleased, or remain idle if he liked, and, as the reader may well suppose, he showed strongly his affection for "the mother of vice."

Louisa had commenced her nineteenth year, and

her birth-day had been celebrated with affectionate joy by Mr. Charlton, when, the morning after, as he was rising from his chair, he fell back insensible. The surgeon, Mr. Nethersole, was sent for in haste, and, by copious bleeding, relieved him for the time ; but he remained ill for some months, and never fully recovered his health.

Alfred Latimer was at Mallington at the time, and remained there while his step-father was obliged to keep his room, wandering about the country, no one knew whither—coming home late at night—and making constant demands upon his mother's purse. One day, however, Edmonds, the park-keeper of Lord Mallington, appeared at Mallington House, and demanded to speak with Mrs. Charlton. He was shown into her presence, and, in his usual bluff and straight-forward manner, proceeded to inform her that her son had been seen, on the preceding night, in the preserves of the earl.

“ He had two other young fellows with him, madam,” he continued, “ and I dare say the young gentleman only did it for a spree ; but there were guns fired, and pheasants killed, that is certain. Now, I thought it best to come and tell you, madam ; for these fellows he was with are not fit company for him, and will get him into mischief : and, as he has been always very civil to our people

when he has called in at the cottage, I thought it a pity to see him go on so."

Mrs. Charlton was really shocked and alarmed, for she had previously entertained no idea of the length to which her son's taste for low society had been carried. She thanked the man sincerely, then, for his warning; and in order to break through such dangerous connections, as well as to remove him before Mr. Charlton was well enough to come down and resume his usual habits, she acted with more firmness than usual where Alfred was concerned, and sent him back to his tutor's with the most serious admonition she had ever bestowed upon him in her life. He might perhaps have resisted, for he seldom showed any great reverence for his mother's authority; but the fact of having been discovered by the game-keepers frightened him, and he obeyed.

At the end of about a month after his departure, Mr. Charlton had sufficiently recovered to go out and walk about the village and the neighbourhood, as he had been accustomed to do, and his daughter Louisa was now his constant companion; for Mrs. Charlton, who had got into habits of great self-indulgence, had by this time grown marvelously stout and heavy, and loved exercise in her carriage better than on foot. His conversation was now generally serious, and sometimes sad; and he

often referred to the probability of his death taking place at no very distant period.

“I speak thus, my dear Louisa,” he said one day, “because I would have you prepare your mind for such an event, as mine is prepared. I know how terribly the loss of one we love comes upon those who have never looked forward to it; and, after such a fit of apoplexy as I have had, one always lives with a drawn sword hung over one, which may fall at any moment.”

Louisa wiped some drops from her eyes; but only replied, “There is one favour I have to ask, my dear father, which is this:—whenever you are ill again, do not let me be kept out of your room. You know that I will be quiet and not disturb you; and the anxiety and pain of being absent from you, and not knowing really and truly how you are, is too terrible,”—and poor Louisa wept.

“Were *you* kept out when I was ill lately?” asked Mr. Charlton, gravely.

“Yes, my dear father,” replied Louisa, “several times. I was told, when I came, that you did not wish to be disturbed; that you would rather not see me then:—as if I would have disturbed you; when I would sit by your bedside for hours without noise or movement, if they would let me. I can bear anything but to be kept from you.”

“You shall not, my sweet child!” said Mr.

Charlton. “I thought there was something of the kind, from not seeing you so often as I wished. But I understand it all, and it shall not occur again.”

Whether the attempt might or not have been made to exclude the child once more from the bed-side of her sick father I cannot say, for it was never put to the proof. Mr. Charlton went on, apparently regaining health and strength, for some months. The winter and the spring passed away without any event; Mrs. Charlton was all kindness and tenderness to her husband; and Louisa was giving way to the full hope of seeing his dark presentiments remain long unrealised. About the month of June news reached the village, that the Earl of Mallington had been taken very ill in London, and three days after came the intelligence that he was dead. But what horrified the attorney in the first instance, and also puzzled both the servants on the estate and the gossips of the place was, that he had died without a will, so that all his estates would go to the next male heir. Who was the next male heir then became the question; but the only house in Mallington which possessed a peerage was Mr. Charlton’s. The solicitor begged leave to borrow it for a day; even Dr. Western looked into it; and Mr. Charlton himself examined it with some curiosity, to know

who was to be their new neighbour. It afforded little satisfaction, however ; for it there appeared, that the late lord had no brothers or uncles living, and in tracing back the ancestry the lawyer declared, that the nearest male heir was the Rev. Mr. Wilmot, a gentleman born about sixty years before, who was particularly marked as having no issue. "And yet," he added, "it would bear a question between him and the heirs of his uncle, Thomas Wilmot of the Grange, if he had any."

He seemed to derive satisfaction from this view of the case, but more especially from the probability of there being great difficulty in settling the claims to the personal property, as the late lord had made no will.

Whether Mr. Charlton had or had not made a will, or whether he intended to alter one he had made, or to make a new one, this fact seemed to occupy much of his thoughts ; and, during three days, he visited the solicitor's office every morning. It was remarked that he grew more grave about this time ; and, as if to dissipate unpleasant imaginations, he made several little excursions, sometimes for a day, sometimes for two or three. Thus passed June, July, and part of August ; but towards the close of the latter month, Mrs. Charlton ventured to have a few friends to dinner. The ladies had not long left the table, when a loud

ringing of the dining-room bell startled the servants in the hall. When the butler ran in, and the footman followed, they found one gentleman supporting Mr. Charlton in his chair, while Dr. Western untied his neckcloth. Mr. Nethersole was instantly sent for, and came with all despatch; but Mr. Charlton was quite insensible: and when the surgeon attempted to open a vein, no blood followed the lancet. He was a bold and skilful man, however, and he instantly cut the artery of the temple. Some relief appeared to be afforded, and the sick man was removed to bed. The visitors, with the exception of Dr. Western, withdrew; and he waited for the office which he saw he might soon be called upon to perform—to console a daughter for the loss of her father. The moment was nearer than he thought; for in about an hour after Mr. Charlton had been removed to his own chamber, Mr. Nethersole came forth leading Louisa in tears to the drawing-room. Dr. Western questioned him with his eyes; the surgeon gravely nodded his head, and returned to Mrs. Charlton, who had remained in the chamber of death.

The solemn quiet of a great change fell upon the whole house. About eleven Dr. Western took leave of his fair young companion, and she retired to weep in her own chamber. Mrs. Charl-

ton had already disappeared ; and the servants, with the exception of one watcher, soon after went to bed. All was still—all was dark ; but about three o'clock a faint light was seen in the library, by the man who drove the mail-cart from the neighbouring town.

The usual proceedings on such an occurrence were gone through with due solemnity ; and the lawyer having given notice to Mrs. Charlton, on the day subsequent to Mr. Charlton's death, that he possessed a signed and attested copy of her late husband's will, by which Dr. Western was appointed one of the executors, that lady instantly sent to the worthy clergyman, begging that he would take the whole arrangements on himself, as she was totally unfit for the task. She requested him also to take possession of her husband's keys, and especially those of the library, in which he kept all his principal papers. Dr. Western did as she desired ; and in due time the will, in the hands of the attorney, was opened, by which it was found that Mr. Charlton had raised the income previously secured to Mrs. Charlton to one thousand per annum ; and then, after a few legacies to his old servants, and marks of kindness to his friends, had left the whole of his property, with the reversion of the principal sum from which his widow received

her annuity, to his daughter, making it an absolute condition, however, that she should not marry Alfred Latimer.

Mrs. Charlton declared herself perfectly satisfied; and, having left the room with her step-daughter, the two executors, of whom the late partner of Mr. Charlton was one, together with the attorney and one of his clerks, proceeded to examine the papers of the deceased. In the strong box, amongst the first things that they found was the duplicate of the will; but what was their surprise when, on opening it, a paper headed "Codicil" dropped out. By it Mr. Charlton confirmed his former will; but premising, that heiresses of considerable property were too often the dupes of sharpers, he went on to make it a condition, that his daughter should obtain the consent of Mrs. Charlton to her marriage, whenever that event took place; and that if she proceeded to contract matrimony without the said consent, he revoked all bequests in her favour, and transferred the whole of his estate to his widow. The codicil was not witnessed, but it was dated and signed; and the lawyer, after examining it attentively, and comparing it with some memorandum books in Mr. Charlton's own handwriting, pronounced it good in law.

Here ends that introductory history which it

was necessary to relate for the better understanding of what is to follow; and henceforth I shall content myself with the depiction of scenes rather than pursue a continuous narrative.

CHAPTER V.

A YEAR passed, or very nearly a year, when, on one bright summer evening, about seven o'clock, the only coach that passed through Mallington appeared as usual at the top of the hill. There seemed no particular load upon the vehicle; two countrymen, going from some village not far off, being the only tenants of the roof, the inside being vacant, and one gentleman seated by the coachman on the box. The luggage was as scanty as the passengers were few; and the tarpauling, stretched over one or two scattered trunks and hampers, looked like the skin of an Alderney cow, so picturesquely irregular was the substratum it covered. The coachman, as may be easily conceived, was not very well pleased with his cargo, and looked for but a scanty supply of shillings and sixpences as his share of the spoil. Nor had the demeanour of his companion on the box by any means tended to lighten his spirits, or make

him better pleased with his situation. He had found him in that position, when he himself assumed the ribands at the half-way house from London, some five or six and twenty miles off, and from that moment till their arrival at the top of Mallington hill, not more than ten words had passed between them, and those uttered by the passenger were mere monosyllables.

When the guard had put on the skid, however, at the top of Mallington hill, the coachman was astounded, as he turned round his head and raised his left hand with a slight shake of the reins, to hear his companion's voice pronouncing a whole uninterrupted sentence.

"Pray, what village is this, coachman?" he said, gazing down the hill, apparently well pleased.

"This is Mallington, sir," the coachman answered; and then he felt a strong inclination to punish his co-occupant of the box for his long taciturnity, by relapsing into silence; but his natural loquacity required vent, and he proceeded to inform the stranger, that the great house on the right was old Mr. Charlton's as was.

"Has he changed his name?" demanded the other.

"Oh dear! no, sir," replied the coachman. "He's got no name at all now, for he's dead. A

very good gentleman he was, too, and wore a pig-tail."

"And who does the house belong to now?" demanded the stranger.

"Why, to his daughter," replied the Jehu, "some say; some say to her step-mother, the widow. Howsoever, the young lady is a great heiress, that's clear; and has as much as six or seven thousand a year of her own."

Were loquacity communicated by the same means as hydrophobia, one might have supposed that the coachman had bitten his companion, for he now asked all manner of questions as they went down the hill; inquired the name of the occupant of every house that they passed at all bigger than a pigsty, and willingly instigated the gentleman of the road to give him all the little anecdotes and detailed descriptions he could furnish of the dwellers in Mallington and its neighbourhood.

As they reached the bottom of the hill, and could just see the sign of the Bagpipes, which, as the reader knows, stood a little back from the highway, the coachman informed his companion that they stopped there twenty minutes to tea; for those were days when there was such a thing occasionally as leisure in life, even on the highway, and people did not think that the only object in

travelling was to be propelled at the greatest possible speed that human nature can endure from one point of the earth's surface to the other. Men were allowed to eat and drink upon the road, to look about them, and sometimes to think. I record it only as a fact in history, for soon it will be forgotten. To the astonishment, and somewhat to the consternation of the coachman, for he had himself nearly twenty miles to go, the stranger replied that he was booked for Mallington, and should alight at the Bagpipes ; and the worthy lord of the reins turned himself a little on his seat, to mark better than he had hitherto marked the appearance of the person who was to get down at Mallington ; for the dropping of a visitor in that village was an event that rarely, if ever, happened, except in one of two cases : namely, when the descendants—I think I may use that word—were of the class bumpkin, or when they were inhabitants of the town or neighbourhood well known to the driver of the old heavy Blue.

Nothing could be more accurate than the young gentleman's whole appearance. He was dressed in black, with a narrow band of crape round his hat, which showed, as the coachman internally observed, that he was in mourning for somebody. Then he had a black handkerchief—not a stock—round his neck, which proved he was not a clergyman, for

clergymen did not wear black handkerchiefs in those days ; and then he had black gloves, fitting neatly to his hand, which proved he was not an undertaker, for the gloves of undertakers are always too long in the fingers ; and then, again, he had a very good hat, glossy in spite of dust and journey, and very well polished boots, which went very far to prove that he was a gentleman. He was not what would be generally called a very handsome man, for colouring, which is what first strikes the eye, was wanting. His countenance had not the slightest resemblance to any face that ever was painted on a sign-post. His complexion was dark, with hair, eyes, and whiskers nearly black, and the eyebrows strongly marked. His forehead was both wide and high, rising straight from the brow, and surrounded by wavy curls ; his nose was straight, with a somewhat wide nostril, and his mouth was beautifully cut, though somewhat stern, while the chin was rather prominent, but well rounded. Though he could not be called exactly pale, yet he had little colour ; but his lips were red and healthy, and his eye clear and bright. In height he might be a little above five feet ten, broad in the chest and shoulders, thin in the flank, and long in the limbs, and in age, perhaps, six or seven and twenty.

All these particulars were gathered by the rapid

eye of the coachman before he pulled up at the door of the inn ; and he had concluded, from his survey, that “ the gentleman was quite a gentleman notwithstanding ;” when the object of his examination got down from the box, and confirmed the judgment internally pronounced upon him by giving coachman and guard each half-a-crown, when the usual fee for “ an outside” was rarely eighteenpence.

“ Those two portmanteaus,” he said, pointing to the roof, as he stood before the inn-door ; and with great alacrity they were handed off, and with greater alacrity received by the porter of the house as indications of a visitor. He put them down, however, and in a quiet common-place way looked at all the five sides that were visible, as if it were a matter of course to ascertain the gentleman’s address; but there was no ticket to be seen, nor brass-plate either, and remarking that the proprietor of the portmanteaus remained looking about him, the porter stepped up to him and touched his own hair—hat he had not—saying, “ Any more luggage, sir ?”

“ An umbrella in the inside,” replied the stranger ; and after having turned the portmanteaus on their other ends, for the convenience of carrying them, and of looking for the name ; and having taken them into the passage disappointed,

the porter came forth again, and searched the coach for the umbrella. He found one with an ivory handle ; and to his great satisfaction, for he was just going to give up the inquiry in despair, he found two capital letters engraved upon the ivory. Those capital letters were E. M. ; and although, of course, there was no possible concatenation of vowels and consonants within the vocabulary of proper and christian names by which those initials might not have been followed—so that the field of conjecture was somewhat large—yet, as I have said, the porter was delighted to have discovered even so much, as he well knew that his importance in the village would be increased in proportion. Before making this important discovery, he had not ventured to intrude upon his mistress, who was taking tea in her own parlour ; but he now put his head into the room, saying, “ Gentleman, ma’am—going to stop—had his boxes down—looking about him—quite a gentleman—E. M. on his umbrella !”

As a spider in the corner of its cunning net, whenever it feels by the vibration of the fine filaments that a fly is struggling in the toils, rushes forth like lightning to secure the prey, so rushed forth Mrs. Pluckrose, the widowed mistress of the Bagpipes, to seize upon the traveller at the first indication of her porter. The thoughts of the

Misses Martin, of Mrs. Dixon, of Mr. Crump, and of half a dozen other lodging housekeepers, came flashing before her imagination, and she saw, in fancy, the traveller ravished from her at her very door, if she did not make haste. The moment she beheld the young gentleman in black, she conceived a high esteem for him, and a desire to cultivate his acquaintance. But there he stood, all unconscious of the tender agitation he was producing, looking up the street towards poor Mr. Charlton's house, or down towards the park of the late Earl of Mallington, or along the river towards the church and the rectory. Mrs. Pluckrose got on a line with him and made a courtsey; but he took not the slightest notice of her, for his eyes had just turned to the other side, and she might have been an elephant for aught he knew. She was a little abashed, but just at that moment she beheld the figure of Mr. Crump coming across, with a sauntering air, as if to see whether the coach had brought anything for him. She knew that no time was to be lost, and moving round directly in front, where it was impossible not to see her, for she was of no inconsiderable width, she dropped another courtsey, saying, "If you are going to stay in Mallington, sir, I hope I shall have the honour of entertaining you."

The gentleman looked at her and nodded his

head good-humouredly, replying, “ I shall stay a few days, madam, and shall remain at the inn, if it is yours.”

There was a little compliment implied in the latter part of this answer, and though it was more in the manner than in the words, and Mrs. Pluckrose was an Englishwoman, yet she took it, and dropped another courtsey.

“ We have two nice rooms, sir,” she said, “ one looking down the river, the other up the village; and I am sure we can make you quite comfortable.”

“ I doubt it not in the least, madam,” replied the stranger, “ I am very easily made comfortable; but that which would tend to do so most at the present moment would be some dinner.”

“ It shall be ready in one minute, sir,” answered Mrs. Pluckrose; and then, seeing Mr. Crump rapidly approaching, she added, in terror lest her triumph should be snatched from her hands, “ Will you not walk in, sir, and look at the rooms?”

Before the stranger could reply, inexorable Mr. Crump was upon him with a card in his hand. “ Allow me to hand you that, sir,” said Mr. Crump, “ in case you should need lodgings.”

“ No; I shall not need any,” replied the gentleman, after having looked at the card, and at the same time holding it out to Mr. Crump again.

“ Pray keep it, sir,” rejoined Mr. Crump, “ one can never tell.”

“ ‘Pon my life, this is too bad!” exclaimed Mrs. Pluckrose.

But the stranger settled the matter for her, replying, “ I would rather not keep it, sir. I do not want lodgings, and am not fond of dirty pieces of pasteboard.”

Mrs. Pluckrose tittered in an ecstasy of delight, the porter grinned; but Mr. Crump, with an air of offended dignity, replied, “ Oh! no offence, sir, I hope. I only meant—”

“ There, that will do, my good man,” answered the young gentleman; “ I am not offended. Good evening. Now, madam, I will see the rooms,” and, following the triumphant Mrs. Pluckrose, he walked into the inn.

CHAPTER VI.

THE stranger was shown to his rooms; they were clean, tidy, and comfortable: the little bed-room, with its white boards and white dimity, looking up the village street, towards the top of the hill, and catching a glance of the green fields at the back of Mallington, over the tops of some low houses; and the sitting-room looking down upon the calm picturesque stream, beyond which appeared the park with its thick trees, and the several habitations of gardeners and gamekeeper dotting the edge of the woodland. The stranger gazed forth with much pleasure; he seemed to take great delight in the beauties of nature, for his eyes wandered up the stream and down the stream, and over the large rounds of oak and elm with an expression of satisfaction which had something almost melancholy in its very intensity.

At length Mrs. Pluckrose, who stood behind him, heard him exclaim, “ How refreshing ! ” and

she immediately concluded that he was some gentleman from the City. He was too good-looking, and too well-dressed, she thought, for a merchant's clerk; but most likely he was a young merchant who had overworked himself in his counting-house, and had come down to Mallington for a little fresh air.

When she had settled that point, she spoke to him of his dinner, asking much in the terms of the schoolboy jest, "Will you have it now, sir?" She did not add, indeed, "or wait till you can get it," whatever she or the stranger might think.

"Why, my good lady," replied her guest, "I thought that by this time it was well nigh cooked; but it does not matter. I dare say you have some cold meat in the house."

"As beautiful a sirloin, sir, as ever you put a knife into," answered Mrs. Pluckrose.

"Well, that will do excellently," replied the stranger; and putting his hand upon the landlady's arm he added, with a gayer look than he had yet borne, "Now I will answer all your questions before they are asked. I will not take any vegetables with it. I will not wait till you just get a potato hot. I do not take any pickles; nor any tart; nor any cheese. I am, in short, my good lady, anxious to get out to take a walk this beautiful evening in this beautiful country; and

therefore would dine as soon as possible. Moreover, I like the place and the rooms so well, that I shall certainly remain for a week, so that there will be plenty of time for cook to show herself skilful."

Mrs. Pluckrose accordingly left him very well satisfied, ordered the cold beef up to the gentleman at once ; and going into the room where the coachman was taking his tea, declared that he had brought her a very nice gay gentleman indeed.

" Gay !" cried the coachman ; " why, he did not speak a word all along the road till he got to the top of the hill."

" More 's the pity, Master Giles," replied the widow, " for he talks very well when he does set about it, I can tell you. He 's quite a gentleman, too. Let 's look at your bill, Giles, there 's a good creature."

The coachman put his hand into his breast pocket, and drew forth a greasy pocket-book, in the heart of which was his way-bill ; but Mrs. Pluckrose scrutinised it in vain for the stranger's name ; and, while she was in the act, the maid who performed the part of waiter came running in for a bottle of sherry.

If the guest drank it all, it must have been out of tumblers, for he had not time to pour out

eleven wine-glassfuls before he walked along the passage to the door.

“ I hope the beef was tender, sir,” said Mrs. Pluckrose, putting out her head.

“ As a maiden’s sigh,” replied her guest, with a smile, and out he went.

Soon disappearing from the sight of Mrs. Pluckrose, the stranger pursued his way, at an easy pace, up the neat broad elm-shaded road, and looked up for an instant at the pretty little village church, about which there were some good old bits of Norman doors and buttresses, and then turned an inquiring eye upon the rectory.

“ Yes,” he said, after pausing for a moment, “ it must be so. There is no other house near. At all events I will see;” and opening the neat gate, he walked along the carriage-road bordered with evergreens, up to the porch covered with ivy and China roses, and rang the bell.

An old white-headed man-servant appeared without making him wait, and the stranger inquired,—“ Am I wrong in supposing this the rectory?”

“ No, sir,” replied the man; “ it is the rectory.”

“ Then is Dr. Western at home?” demanded the stranger.

“ Yes, sir,” answered the servant; “ but—”

“ He is at dinner, perhaps ?” said the visitor.

“ Oh dear ! no, sir,” was the answer, with a smile ; “ he has dined these three hours ; he is at tea.”

“ Well, then, my good friend,” rejoined the stranger, “ will you let him know, with an apology for interrupting him by so late a visit, that I wish much for a few moments’ conversation with him ?”

“ Will you step into this room, sir ?” said the man ; and he ushered the visitor into the doctor’s library.

The clergyman finished the cup of tea which had been poured out for him, and then, leaving his sister with a young lady who was passing the evening with them, he walked with a slow step to the study, where, opening the door, he regarded the stranger with his calm and thoughtful eyes—not long enough to make the glance unpleasant, but sufficiently long to afford the worthy doctor those physiognomical indications which he was fond of obtaining in regard to every new being of the same species as himself with whom he came in contact. The result was, in this instance, highly satisfactory to him.

“ This is a fine countenance,” he said internally, “ thoughtful, and yet frank.”

“ You wished to see me, sir, I think ?” he pro-

ceeded aloud ; “ pray be seated ;” and he himself took his accustomed arm-chair, leaning back in it, but bending forward his head in an attitude of polite attention.

“ I have the honour, Dr. Western,” replied the stranger, “ of bringing you this letter from Sir Henry Scarsdale, who was once, I think, a pupil of yours at Oxford. If you will read it, you will see what is my object.”

“ Delighted to hear from my young friend,” replied the old gentleman, his face lighting up ; “ he was always a great favourite of mine, and any friend of his must be always so ——”

As he had spoken, he had torn open the letter, and was going on reading it ; but something that he saw therein made him stop suddenly in his speech, and fix his whole attention upon the contents. The letter was somewhat long, and the doctor said nothing more till he had got to the end, except such words as “ certainly ”—“ with the greatest pleasure ”—“ indeed ! ” but when he had concluded the perusal, he rose, held out his hand to the stranger, and said,—“ I am delighted to see you, sir. If you will do me the honour of taking up your abode in my poor house, it will give me great pleasure, and any assistance I can afford is, of course, yours to command in any way.”

“ I feel very much obliged to you, my dear sir,” replied the guest, “ and obliged to Scarsdale for procuring me the pleasure of an introduction to you; but I think it will be best to retain my quarters at your little inn here, where I have two comfortable rooms enough, and the landlady seems a good woman.”

“ Oh, an excellent creature!” replied the clergyman. “ Were you sick, you would find what a kind motherly being she is.”

“ Now, my dear sir, I will not detain you longer,” said the stranger; “ you are at tea, I know.”

“ May I not ask you to join my little party?” said the clergyman; “ there are but my sister, and a very sweet young lady, whom we love almost as a child—the cynosure of neighbouring eyes, indeed—Miss Charlton.”

“ What! the fair lady of the house upon the hill?” asked the visitor.

The good doctor answered in the affirmative, adding, — “ My ward, though she will soon escape from tutelage.”

The stranger willingly accepted the rector’s invitation, and Dr. Western rose to show him the way, but paused at the door, and turning with a smile to his new acquaintance, said,—“ I had forgotten to ask the name.”

“ Oh! Edmond Morton,” replied the young gentleman ; and the clergyman leading the way, they were soon in the drawing-room, where Mr. Morton was introduced first to Dr. Western’s sister, Mrs. Evelyn, and next to Miss Charlton. Louisa had now expanded into the beauty of womanhood, but yet it was that of young maturity. The flower was no longer in the bud, but it was not full blown. She had inherited not only all her mother’s features, but her mother’s grace, as well as a fine mind and lovely person ; and though her dress was very simple, and still mourning, yet there was that look of dignity about her, that calm repose which may be occasionally found in all classes, but which, wherever found, speaks one character of heart and spirit. The rich waving brown hair fell without art into the forms that sculpture has loved to give it, and in the whole cutting of the features, the eye of Edmond Morton, and he was no mean judge, could discover scarcely one flaw. If there was anything, perhaps it was a want of animation that struck him at first as a defect ; but yet there was a deep light in those soft and somewhat sad eyes, which made him think that the whole face might become full of expression when the bosom was moved by any powerful emotion. However, he had seen many a very lovely girl before that,

and was not very easily to be captivated. His was too gentlemanly a spirit, also, to examine the person of a lady as he would have criticised a horse ; and thus he was neither so much struck with Louisa's appearance at first as many might have been, nor did he remark all the beauty of her form and face till he had been some time in her company.

On her part, Louisa paid little attention to his appearance. He was a friend of Dr. Western's, and that was enough to gain her favourable consideration. She thought him a very good-looking young man, also ; and, perhaps, drew comparisons between the tone and carriage of the stranger, and those of the good folks of the neighbourhood, rather to the disadvantage of the latter, but it went no further. She thought not of flirting with him, or attracting his attention, and, for some time, while he sat talking with Mrs. Evelyn, entering at once, with a peculiar sort of *bienséance*, into the position of a friend rather than a new acquaintance, Louisa remained silent, or only said a few words to Dr. Western. The good rector, however, was not pleased with her reserve, he was, to say sooth, somewhat proud of his fair ward ; he thought her, in his heart, the loveliest and the best of girls, and his very indignation at Mrs. Charlton, for differing

greatly with him on that point, made him anxious to have all the rest of the world upon his side. He was determined, therefore, that he would draw her out; and though Louisa was, indeed, somewhat sad that evening, from various unpleasant things which had occurred in her own house, yet Dr. Western, who well knew her, soon won her to a gay smile, and then to a laugh. He changed the subject, then, and spoke of his parish and his poor, and dwelt upon one or two of those scenes of distress which every clergyman who does his duty must witness, without being able to alleviate, or, at least, not much: the dying mother—the reprobate son—the broken-hearted parents—the anguish of remorse; and as he went on, to Edmond Morton's surprise, that calm and placid countenance, which he had thought inanimate, showed that it could express with intense feeling every different emotion of the mind. She forgot herself too, entirely; conversed eagerly and well on every topic that was brought before her, and poured forth the pure high feelings of a noble and generous heart in sympathy for sorrow or for joy. Towards Morton himself, too, her reserve died away, and finding in him stores of thought and information, such as few possessed around her, joined with a grace and ease of demeanour which can only be gained by long and intimate

communication with the truly noble and the really high, she gave herself up to a new charm, and almost forgot the passing hours till the change of light warned her that day was coming to a close. Then starting up, with a smile, she said,—“I must away, dear Mrs. Evelyn, or I shall be scolded by my mother for wandering so late.”

“Nay, but my song, Louisa—my song!” cried Dr. Western.

“Oh! it must be for another night,” replied Miss Charlton: “See, it is really growing dark.”

“Well, we will walk with you up the village,” said the rector, “if Mr. Morton has no objection; and as we return I will give him a full, true, and particular account of all the villagers whose houses we pass, that he may learn to esteem the inhabitants of Mallington properly.”

“Oh! pray do not,” replied Louisa; “you are so severe upon us, dear friend, that I fear, if you give him your view of our faults and failings, he will run away from the place to-morrow morning.”

“Nay, I will be just, my dear,” answered Dr. Western: and, as soon as Louisa’s shawl and bonnet were adjusted, they set out upon their way.

CHAPTER VII.

THE rector of Mallington gave his left arm to Louisa Charlton, and Mr. Morton walked on the other side of that fair lady. A shade had come over her face as they passed close to the church-yard, and as the low cold dwellings of its silent tenants met her sight. It was not exactly the shade of grief, indeed, but of calm serious thought. The conversation of her new acquaintance had been of many things — various, rich, fanciful, amusing ; and, though she did not know or perceive it, the deep current that lay beneath the sparkling surface had tended to promote reflection, even while it seemed only to excite the imagination. It had, of course, been all of worldly things ; but it had led the mind, by a natural and quiet course, to find the latent relations between those very worldly things and the higher, the more spiritual, with which they all have some mysterious connection.

Dr. Western remarked the shadow, but he took no notice ; and their young companion saw it also, but remained silent : so that they had reached the end of the village street, and were beginning to walk slowly up the hill, before either of the three spoke.

“ Had we not better go by the field path ? ” said Louisa Charlton, turning to her guardian ; “ it is so much more beautiful, and so much quieter.”

“ No, my dear child,” answered the old gentleman ; “ that would be hardly fair : ” and he smiled as he spoke.

Louisa looked in his face with an inquiring glance ; and Edward Morton went farther, asking, “ How do you mean—not fair, my dear sir ? ”

“ Because, I think, it would almost amount to robbery,” replied the good doctor, “ to deprive the people of my parish of the high delight they will experience in seeing you and Miss Charlton and myself walking up the village together as familiarly as if you had been living here for ten years. You cannot imagine, sir, what a source of innocent delight this walk of ours will afford to some hundred of people in Mallington ; what an inexhaustible fund of conversation it will supply to persons who have nothing else on earth to talk about ; what a diversion it will effect, as you soldiers call it, in favour of poor Mrs. Pilkin, who

took a Sunday walk the other day with a gay bachelor, whose banns with her fair self I have to publish for the first time on Sunday next—but the people know nothing of that; and how you, and I, and Louisa, without our own consciousness, or any effort on our part, but merely that of walking up this hill instead of going by the fields, will enliven every tea-table this night—will afford zest and interest to the cold chicken and slice of ham,—even if we do not make Miss Martin revoke, or Mr. Crump misdeal.”

Both Louisa and Mr. Morton smiled; and the latter inquired, “Is it really such a gossiping little place?”

“Just in proportion to its idleness,” answered Dr. Western in a graver tone; “as, indeed, is always the case. Being a place of no trade, and I might almost say no society, the people, for one-half of their time, have nothing to do but comment on their neighbours. The residence of half a dozen respectable families in or near the village would speedily work a great change in these respects; for idleness is the parent of gossip, as well as of most minor vices, and of many great ones also. See, Louisa,” he continued, “they are all out at their doors already, as if with a sort of presentiment they would have something to talk about; and now, don’t you see, there is Mrs. Molineux

who keeps the pie-shop, has gone in to Mrs. Stubbs, the plumber and glazier's wife, to tell her the fact, that you and I, and the strange gentleman who came by the coach, are walking up the village together." Then, sinking his voice to a whisper, he added in Miss Charlton's ear, " You are given away already, Louisa ; the whole matter is settled and done in the opinion of the gossips of Mallington."

Louisa laughed, and coloured a little—very little indeed ; but just sufficiently to show that she understood what the good rector meant, and felt that it was a thing not quite impossible that she should marry such a man as he who was then walking beside her.

As they proceeded on their way Dr. Western, according to promise, expounded to Edmund Morton the character, situation, and peculiarities, of the various inhabitants of Mallington whose dwellings they passed ; and he did it very pleasantly, never uncharitably nor bitterly, though often a little satirically. The doctor, the solicitor, the retired naval commander, the old maids and their opponent, the new shopkeeper and his pretensions—from a humble and quiet widow woman, of very limited income, who lived in the last house at the bottom of the hill, to the little fat bustling demagogue of a retired London tradesman, who

had brought down drab gaiters and democracy, the spirit of opposition to everything, and an utter contempt for the aspirate to the new sphere of Mallington—were all passed in review by the worthy doctor, with so much more detail than Louisa had ever heard him use before, that she could not help thinking that the rector must have some particular desire to give Mr. Morton a full and comprehensive knowledge of his parish and its parishioners.

As they walked up the hill but slowly, they were passed at a quick pace by Mrs. Charlton's maid, Mistress Windsor, who, still in as great favour with her lady as ever, had been elevated to the rank of housekeeper, and, to use a vulgar expression, had both feathered her nest and tricked out her plumage handsomely during the three or four last years of Mr. Charlton's life. Though not so young as when first she was introduced to the reader and bearing certain traces of it in wrinkle and line, she was still a very active woman, and had lost no portion of her shrewdness. She was as keen as her mistress: even, perhaps, a little keener, and she had always made it a point of showing herself especially respectful towards Miss Charlton, both before and after her master's death. It had been her common observation that nobody could tell what might happen. Now this was not

a maxim of particular application, but a wide, broad, philosophical axiom, which was the basis of one-half of her conclusions; and when Mr. Charlton first fell ill she redoubled her attention to Louisa, saying to herself, “No one can tell what may happen.” When Mr. Charlton died, she was still more attentive, repeating “No one can tell what may happen;” and when she heard the will read, and found that the deceased had left the great bulk of his property, except the annuity to his widow, to the young lady, Mrs. Windsor was satisfied with her own conduct; and, although she did think it strange that Mr. Charlton should have so strictly tied his daughter’s hands in regard to her marriage, she still determined to show herself devoted to Louisa, observing once more, “No one can tell what may happen.” She had, indeed, taken care at the same time to give no just cause of offence to fair Mrs. Charlton, but was quite as ready at all times to do everything she could to forward that lady’s views as she had been from the first. Mrs. Charlton, indeed, saw through her—yes, through and through her, reader. She was not merely diaphanous, but quite transparent to the eyes of Mrs. Charlton; and yet that worthy lady was not at all inclined to let Mrs. Windsor see that she bore any ill will towards her for courting Louisa, even if she did

feel annoyed at it, which I do not pretend to say she did not. Mrs. Charlton and Mrs. Windsor had known each other for many years. Mrs. Windsor had served Mrs. Charlton very well and very faithfully, as has been shown ; and Mrs. Charlton had every inclination to pass over any little faults, but not from gratitude ; for if Mrs. Charlton could have strangled Mrs. Windsor with her own hands, and nothing more said about it, who can tell if she would not have done it ?

As the respectable abigail now passed by Dr. Western and Louisa, she paused, half turned round, and dropped a low courtsey, then resumed her quick pace again, and reached the house some time before them. As soon as she had entered the doors, instead of betaking herself to the house-keeper's room, as she usually did in ordinary circumstances, she inquired of one of the footmen whether her mistress was alone in the drawing-room ; and finding that such was the case, she walked straight up thither, without taking off bonnet or shawl.

“ What is it, Windsor ? ” demanded the lady, as soon as she appeared, speaking in a querulous tone, and putting a pen with which she had been writing into the inkstand.

“ Why, ma'am, I thought I would just tell you

that Miss Charlton is coming back," replied Mrs. Windsor.

"Well, I suppose she is," answered her mistress, still crossly; "it is time she should, for it is getting quite dark, I can hardly see to write."

"Yes, ma'am," rejoined the housekeeper; "but there is a gentleman with her as well as Dr. Western, and I thought you might like to know."

"A gentleman!" said Mrs. Charlton, with a greater degree of interest; "what sort of a gentleman, Windsor?"

"You can see him, ma'am, from the window," replied Mrs. Windsor: "he's a fine looking young man, who came down by the coach to-night, I heard, and has put up at the inn; and he took the two rooms there for a fortnight, and then went to Dr. Western's direct."

By this time Mrs. Charlton reached a western window which looked down the hill, and was gazing steadfastly upon the group which was slowly walking up. The remaining light fell full upon them, and she could see them pause, and look round over the scene below, with the high old trees of the park on the opposite side of the valley, and the sunset glow in the sky above; and she remarked that the stranger pointed with his hand, and seemed to make some inquiry, and that when they came forward again Louisa's fair

face was raised towards him with a bright warm smile upon her lips.

Mrs. Charlton smiled too; but it was not with a very pleasant, though with a pleased expression. It seemed as if she said to herself, "That will do," but yet as if that which was to be done was not very full of human charities. "Go down, Windsor," she said, "and tell Edward when Dr. Western comes to beg him to walk in, for I wish to speak with him—and the young gentleman who is with him, of course. And hark ye, Windsor, I wish you would find out who he is, and all about him; for, of course, I am very willing to show attention to any one who visits Mallington—and yet, of course, I must be careful of whom I bring into Miss Charlton's company—but, of course, I must wish Mr. Latimer to have some more and some better society than he finds here—and, of course,—but run down Windsor, and tell Edward what I have said, for they are coming near."

Mrs. Windsor hurried away with a grave face to do as she was bid, but her grave face only lasted to the back of the door, and then she murmured to herself "As if I did not know!"

The footman received his instructions in terms that he was well disciplined to understand, and the next minute the great bell rang. He walked with slow and stately step to the door, and having

opened it drew back to let Miss Charlton pass, but as she shook hands with Dr. Western, and wished the stranger good-night, the man stepped forward again and said, “ My mistress, sir, told me to say, if you came, that she wished to speak with you for one moment if you would have the kindness to walk up.”

“ I will wait for you here, my dear sir,” said Mr. Morton ; but Louisa, with colour slightly rising in her cheek,—for she did not always know how her fair step-mother would view her proceedings,—interposed, exclaimed, “ Oh, no ; pray come in, Mr. Morton ; Mrs. Charlton will be very happy to see you, I am sure.”

“ Perhaps”—replied the visitor, but before he could conclude his sentence the rector kindly laid his hand on his arm, saying, “ Nay, come in, my young friend ; if Mrs. Charlton has any matter of business to speak of, we can find another room in this house. It is not like my little rectory, and there are plenty of council chambers.”

Edmond Morton could only bow, and follow whither the doctor and Louisa led ; and in a moment after he was formally introduced to Mrs. Charlton. The fair widow was all smiles and graciousness, though, to say sooth, some part of her youthful grace had fled, for she had become rather fuller in her proportions than was alto-

gether consistent with exact symmetry. As she was not a very tall woman, the difference of the breadth in relation to the length, as compared with what she had been when she changed from Latimer to Charlton, was not to her advantage—in personal appearance, at least—and yet she was a very pretty woman, *très bien conservée*, as our French neighbours term it; fair, smooth-skinned, delicate-featured, with nothing that could indicate a year more than forty, or anything else than the sweetest possible disposition, the most placable and considerate mind. She was delighted to see Dr. Western; she was charmed to receive Mr. Morton; she was tenderly affectionate to dear Louisa. She was the pink of step-mothers, and the pleasantest of friends. All that she had to say to the rector was, that she had for the time given up her intention of going to Cheltenham, in consequence of letters that she had received that morning; and although Dr. Western had never heard of her purpose, he expressed himself very well satisfied that she had abandoned it, saying, that he was not fond of Cheltenham, especially in what is termed the season; he thought it a bad place for young men, and a worse place for young women.

Mrs. Charlton smiled sweetly, and accused him of being too severe in his notions; and

then, turning to Mr. Morton, she inquired if he did not admire their quiet little rustic village, so beautifully situated amongst its woods and fields.

“ I have really seen very little of it as yet, madam,” replied the young gentleman, “ having been here but a few hours ; but as I am a great lover of the beauties of nature, I have no doubt that I shall find enough to admire.”

Mrs. Charlton was delighted that he was a lover of the beauties of nature ; and declared that they would show him plenty of the sweetest scenery in the world, and appealed to Dr. Western whether they would not. She must positively, she said, make a party to take him to the waterfall up the glen, and insisted that he should not venture to visit it without her presence ; and she ended by asking the rector, and his friend, and Mrs. Evelyn, to dinner the next day at an early hour, that they might take a walk before tea.

“ Hang it !” thought the worthy clergyman, “ the widow is looking for a third husband already.” But he did her great injustice. Mrs. Charlton was no longer Mrs. Latimer, and though she always had her objects, they were very different from what they had been, and from what Dr. Western imagined. For himself

he accepted her invitation, but declined for Mrs. Evelyn, who never went out to dinner, as Mrs. Charlton well knew; and Mr. Morton promising to accompany him, the two gentlemen took their leave just as the lady asked Louisa to ring for lights.

“ Well, my dear sir, what do you think of my fair neighbour?” asked the clergyman, when they were fairly out of the house; “ having seen her yourself, you will need no explanation.”

“ I think not,” replied Edmond Morton, drily. “ May I ask, my dear sir, if she is really that sweet girl’s mother?”

“ You see signs of a different race, eh?” said Dr. Western, with a smile. “ Very different, indeed, I can assure you. I never saw Louisa’s mother; but from what I have heard, she was very like her daughter, both in person and mind. I need not tell you that Mrs. Charlton is not. Nevertheless, she is a very good and respectable woman.”

“ A very artificial one, I should think,” replied Edmond Morton. “ Should I be wrong, my dear doctor, if I said a very artful one?”

“ Nay, nay,” cried the rector, “ that is a somewhat harsh term. She seems worldly, it must be confessed, and so far, I believe, you have judged right, though how you have formed your opinion

in so short a time, I cannot tell. It took me longer to form mine."

"I have been all my life accustomed to observe small traits," replied his companion, "and have seldom found their indications fallacious. I know, indeed, that they may be so used, that the habit of remarking them begets in us a particular sort of vanity in our own penetration, which makes us unwilling to admit that we are deceived when we really are so. Therefore, I never allow myself to act from the impressions first received, till they are confirmed by further observation. Yet I think I cannot be mistaken in my estimate of either of the ladies we have just left."

"And what of Louisa, then?" asked Dr. Western.

"Hardly fair, my dear sir," rejoined his companion. "She is wonderfully beautiful when she is animated; but I should think that she was a flower that required very tender usage, and that she has not had it always."

"Yet she is of a firm and high mind," answered the clergyman, eagerly; "I know not any one in whom such gentleness is blended with such a strong sense of what is right."

"I am sure it is," replied Morton; "in truth, my dear doctor, hers is a neighbourhood of which one may well be afraid."

“ You know she is an heiress, and her fortune very large,” said Dr. Western, in a peculiar tone.

“ I have heard so this evening,” replied the young gentleman; “ but I once heard a very noble and amiable friend declare that if it rained heiresses he would go out with an umbrella, and I have always been very much of his way of thinking.” The rector laughed, but Mr. Morton, changing the subject, reminded him that he was to give him a sight of some papers; and they both quickened their pace towards the rectory.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE Misses Martin had discovered all about it; the Misses Martin had settled it all in their own minds—they were mighty minds for settling other people's affairs; but when Mrs. Windsor, on the following morning, walked into their shop, as she called it, “ promiscuously,” to buy a piece of narrow tape—thinking that if there were in all Mallington any person or persons who could gather the whole particulars of Mr. Morton's history, the Misses Martin must be the people—they proved obdurately silent, notwithstanding every hint and question she could devise. Had she asked no questions, had she given no hints of a wish to discover more of Mr. Morton, the Misses Martin might very possibly, from a desire to hear what that gentleman had been doing at Mallington House, have proved communicative themselves; but as soon as the two ladies perceived that Mrs. Windsor was on

the search for information, they resolved not to give it, for there was war between Mrs. Charlton and the Misses Martin—civil war it might indeed be called, for it was more real than apparent, and conducted with all politeness. Mrs. Charlton had triumphed over the Misses Martin—she had married the rich widower—she had surrounded herself with wealth and splendour—she had been raised into the first position in the society of the neighbourhood, in spite of all the Misses Martins inuendos and slanders—and she had set up a rival in a shop. These were things not to be forgotten by the Misses Martin, and, as I have said, they remained obdurately silent, although they had settled the whole affairs of Mr. Edmond Morton an hour or more before Mrs. Windsor appeared.

But Mrs. Windsor was a skilful general, and, by a well-conceived manœuvre, she turned their flank. There was a neighbour of the Misses Martin just three doors off; he was a bookseller and stationer, well to do in the world—an elderly bachelor, a very respectable man. He differed from the Church of England in several of his religious notions, and occasionally preached his own doctrines himself to a select congregation; but, nevertheless, he was just the sort of man to be very high in the esteem of the Misses Martin,

who, though they belonged to the Church of England, had no objection to marry any one—only nobody asked them. Mr. Sowerby was fond of news, and Mrs. Windsor, remembering well that the Misses Martin were in the habit, one or the other, of running into Mr. Sowerby's shop eight-and-forty times each day—that is to say, once every quarter of an hour while it was open—conceived that ere the period of her visit they must, by an inevitable necessity, have told that gentleman all that they had gathered of Mr. Morton. The moment, therefore, that the tape was bought and paid for, she turned her steps to Mr. Sowerby's, and asked for some note paper. The worthy master of the shop was delighted to see her, and began at once by telling her that it was a pleasant day, but warm—very warm. As Mrs. Windsor had discovered this interesting fact before, she assented without any long consideration, and then went on to say that the night before had been very warm likewise, to which Mr. Sowerby agreed; but then Mrs. Windsor proceeded to relate how warm she had found it as she walked up from the bottom of the hill, and ended,—“I declare I thought I should have dropped just as I was passing Miss Charlton and the young gentleman she brought up with her from the rectory.”

"Well now," cried Mr. Sowerby, "that is just what I wanted to speak to you about, Mrs. Windsor. It is very odd you should mention it, isn't it? Let me shut the door;" and, stretching over the counter, he pushed it to.

"Well," he said, in continuation, "I saw Miss Charlton, and the young gentleman, and Dr. Western, go up the village together, for I was standing at my door, and I wondered who he could be—the young man I mean; but when I found out who he is and all about him, I said to myself, says I, 'that is no bird for Miss Charlton's money, for if Mrs. Windsor should chance to look in, I'll just give her a hint—it is but kind and neighbourly.'"

"I'm very much obliged indeed, Mr. Sowerby," replied the housekeeper. "I did not much like the look of him myself; but then I could not say anything to my mistress, because I had got nothing to go upon."

"Well, then, I'll tell you all about it," said Mr. Sowerby. "He's no more than an artist, take my word for it, Mrs. Windsor; and, you know my word is good for a thousand pounds at any time: an artist, going about the country sketching."

"But how did you find it out?" asked Mrs. Windsor. "I know you are a shrewd one, Mr. Sowerby; not easy to take you in."

Mr. Sowerby laughed and shook his head, with a look as wise as that of the Athenian fowl, saying, “No, no; but I’ll tell you all about it. Last night, when the boy brought in my beer for supper from the Bagpipes, I asked him what was the name of the gentleman who had come by the coach. He could not tell a word about it, only that Boots said there was E. M. marked upon his umbrella. Well, I could make nothing of that; but I told the boy to find out and let me know, and I gave him a penny for himself, Mrs. Windsor; so this morning—for gold is the key to everything, Mrs. Windsor, gold is the key to everything—he brought me word that the gentleman’s name is Edmond Morton, for a letter had come for him by post. Well, that was something gained; but I could get no farther, till just about an hour ago, in comes Mathilda Martin, and you know how she talks. Well, she did run on enough to deafen one: but she told me that their girl, going across the park to carry a gown-piece that the old house-keeper at the hall had bought yesterday, saw this Mr. Morton in the park as early as seven o’clock this morning; and that when she came back, about half an hour after, she chanced upon him again sitting under a tree, with a large book on his knee, drawing away as hard as he could draw, taking a picture, in fact, of the old place.”

“ But many a gentleman draws now a days,” answered the housekeeper. “ Our young lady draws quite beautiful; you would almost think they were real houses and trees.”

“ Well, you shall hear, you shall hear, Mrs. Windsor,” continued the stationer. “ As soon as I heard what Mathilda Martin told me, says I, ‘ Oh, ho! Edward Morton! I think I have heard that name before;’ and, reaching up there to the shelf just behind you, Mrs. Windsor, I took down that long book—no, not that one—the one with the blue back, gilt and lettered—and there I saw—just look into the title—‘ Sketches in England and Wales, by Thomas Morton, R.A.’ Well, you know what a giddy thing Mathilda Martin is; and she immediately fancied that this young man must be the very Thomas Morton, R.A., and that the boy must have made a mistake about the first name. ‘ But,’ says I, ‘ look at the date, Miss Mathilda;’ and there it stood, sure enough, twenty years ago. Now this young man can’t be more than five and twenty I should think; and it is not likely he should publish sketches in England and Wales when he was five years old, unless he were a phenomenon. ‘ No, no, Miss Martin,’ I says, ‘ he is that old Morton’s son. He had a son, I know, and his name was Edward, I am very sure.’ ”

“ You are quite right, Mr. Sowerby,” replied Mrs. Windsor, “ and I will tell Mrs. Charlton all about it, and how you found it out, for I think it is very clever;” and after a little more gossip Mrs. Windsor left the shop with a well-pleased smile, saying to herself, “ This will be quite the thing, I fancy.”

As soon as she reached Mallington House she sought her mistress, who was in her dressing-room, and reported progress. Mrs. Charlton smiled likewise, and drew in her eyes a little; but the next moment she looked grave, and said, “ It must be all nonsense, Windsor; I do not believe a word of it. Pray tell the people that I think it is all nonsense.”

“ I will, ma’am,” replied Mrs. Windsor, and was going: but her mistress called her back, and added, “ Make further inquiries, Windsor, but more quietly—you understand.—I wish to hear about it, but without seeming to know.”

“ Very well, ma’am,” replied Mrs. Windsor; and she fulfilled her lady’s orders with due discretion, discovering further confirmation of Mr. Sowerby’s views. But, to the surprise of all Mallington, the more strong became the presumption that Mr. Morton was an artist, the more marked became Mrs. Charlton’s attentions towards him; and Dr. Western observed, with some wonder,

that both that evening, during dinner and afterwards, and on an excursion planned by the lady next day, Mrs. Charlton threw Louisa almost entirely upon Mr. Morton, while she endeavoured to monopolise the rector to herself, so that he mentally inquired, "Hang it! the good lady can't want to marry me, surely?" But Mrs. Windsor knew her mistress better, and watched the game that was playing with some interest.

Mr. Morton did not understand it at all, but found it, as far as it went, not at all unpleasant. With a lovely girl upon his arm, in that very sweet stage of acquaintanceship when first impressions of esteem are warming into intimacy, where each with the other is, like an intelligent traveller, wandering through a fresh country, and discovering new beauties at every step, where conversation is neither oppressed by deep feelings, nor restrained by strangeness, but all the doors of thought are open, and the heart itself every now and then peeps out to see the sunny world without—it is a pleasant thing, a very pleasant thing indeed, to walk through fair scenes with a fair being like Louisa Charlton, and to listen to a sweet musical voice, and to read a world of fairy tales in bright young eyes, all the brighter for friendly

words and kind companionship. Very pleasant indeed!—But, perhaps, the reader may ask if it is not somewhat dangerous too? I can but answer, “That is as it may be.”

CHAPTER IX.

IN the early morning of a summer's day, with the dew still upon the grass, and the light wind destined to die away like youthful graces in the sun's meridian light, Edmond Morton walked out of the little inn at which he had taken up his abode, and bent his steps over the bridge to the fine old park which I have noticed in the commencement of this work.

The maids of the inn were just up, and busy, in manifold curl-papers and unwashed faces, setting rooms to rights ; and even the Boots himself, the most matutinal of all bipeds except chanticleer, was not by any means sufficiently awakened to be as brisk and active as at all ordinary hours he showed himself. Mrs. Pluckrose was still sound asleep ; and walking out with clothes that had been brushed, and boots that had been blacked, the night before, Mr. Morton gave no trouble to, and attracted little attention from, any one. On

the old stone bridge, of three irregular arches, he paused and gazed for a minute or two into the stream, on the bosom of which numerous dab-chicks and water-hens were swimming about, undoubtedly thinking that no man with a gun would feel inclined to annoy them so early in the morning. They might have found themselves mistaken ; but certainly in regard to Edmond Morton they were in the right, for he did not feel disposed to do them any harm, and they appeared to understand it well ; for, as he looked over the parapet upon the water, though they turned up towards him the shrewd inquiring eye, they did not hurry off to their sedgy lurking-places as they would have done at a later hour, nor dive down in eager haste to escape the anticipated shot. He was not bloodily disposed, indeed ; and yet there was a stout old trout who, having escaped many perils, and grown to aldermanic bulk, now lay head against stream, at the tail of a pleasant ripple, which did move a little in his bosom the tiger that is more or less in the hearts of all men. He thought it would be a pleasant thing, on a fine May morning, to bring that fellow to the landing-place ; but neither rod nor line had he with him at the moment, and, even if he had, it was getting somewhat late in the year to trifle with trouts, so

that the tyrant of the stream would have been safe.

Now, Heaven only knows what connection there was between the sight of that trout and so different a being as Louisa Charlton. The mind rarely jumps, though it runs up many a ladder with surprising swiftness ; and there are general links or, to pursue the metaphor, steps of association between each thought that presents itself and another. Certain it is, however, whether it was that he thought it would be agreeable to withdraw that fair girl from all that surrounded her, and carry her away with him, as he had proposed to do with the trout, or whether angling for a pretty wife was a sport he found pleasure in, or whether anything else in the wide expanse of possibility linked the two together,—certain it is, that the next thought that presented itself to his imagination was Louisa Charlton. It served him all across the bridge and up to the park gates, which lay at the end of a short avenue, of not more than two hundred yards in length. But there, just as he was about to pull the cucumber-shaped handle of an old bell that hung beside the wrought-iron trellis-work, he paused and looked at the windows of the lodge, saying to himself, “ It is needless to rouse the good old dame before her hour.”

The dimity curtains were closely drawn across the lattice, and taking that indication in good part, he walked back to the bridge again, and gazed once more into the stream. The trout was still there, just where he had left it ; but Morton did not see it at all, for he had now got something else to think of, and he went on with Louisa Charlton very pleasantly, as if he were taking a sunny walk with her through the fairy land of fancy.

In about ten minutes he turned round his head towards the gates, and saw the old dame who kept the lodge open the casement and hook it back—her summer morning's first task,—and sauntering gently on, he now rang the bell.

“ Oh ! is it you, sir ? ” said the good lady, who had seen him there more than once before, putting out her head ; “ I will come in a minute ; ” and after she had fastened her gown she came to the gates and unlocked them, with a courtsey, saying, as she did so,—“ The other gate up the stream is always open—ay, and must be, too, for some one broke the lock off—a mischievous young rogue he must have been—and ever since my lord's death the bailiff says he has no orders.”

“ And pray who is your lord now, my good lady ? ” asked Mr. Morton.

“ Ay, sir, that is hard to say,” answered Dame Witherton ; “ an old gentleman, I have heard tell,

of the name of Wilmot—a parson, it seems, and very fond of money.”

“ He ought to spend some here to put the house in better order,” answered Morton. “ It is truly a pity to see so fine a place as this might be, if well kept up, falling into decay.”

“ Ay, that it is, indeed,” answered the old woman with a sigh. “ I remember it quite a different thing; but even Edmonds, the park-keeper, is falling out of heart. He can’t get the work-people paid, and is obliged to discharge them, poor man; though it breaks his heart to see the gravel walks getting weedy, and the trees all straggling, and the people stealing the game. But he cannot pay men himself—that is impossible. It is bad enough for him, with a family, to live here without his own wages; and work night and day for people that don’t say ‘ Thank you.’ ”

“ Quite enough, indeed, and too much, I should suppose,” replied Mr. Morton; “ but I suppose this Edmonds is fond of the place.”

“ Ay, that he is,” answered Dame Witherton, “ it is all his delight, sir—his hobby, as Dr. Western calls it. Why, I remember him—Lord bless you, sir!—a little curly-headed boy, born in that very cottage where he now lives, for his father, poor Tim Edmonds, was park-keeper before him.”

“ And where does he live, my good dame ? ” asked the visitor at Mallington.

“ Bless you, sir ! —why, don’t you know ? ” exclaimed the lady of the lodge. “ Why, you have seen that pretty house just hidden from the hall by the tall trees in front. That’s where John Edmonds lives.”

“ I will walk up and see him,” answered Morton. “ I want to have a ramble all over the park from one end to the other.”

“ Then he is just the man to show it you,” rejoined the old lady, “ for there is not a rabbit has a burrow in the place but he knows all the ins and outs of it.”

Fully relying upon the accuracy of her statements, Edmond Morton walked on to find out the house of the park-keeper, which he was not long in accomplishing, for, to say the truth, he had not dealt fairly with the good old woman, having clearly understood before the conversation began, which was the dwelling of John Edmonds ; but, having a sort of cynical belief that there is nothing so pleasant to “ withered eld ” as to tell a story its own way, he had let her go on, without giving a hint of the stores of information he possessed.

Thither, however, he now bent his steps, and at the end of about a quarter of an hour, perceived the lodge amongst the trees. Everything was

neat about it; and the evidences of man's careful spirit gave the place a cheerful look, though it was actually somewhat decayed, and one of the chimneys had a strong inclination to fall. The door had no bell, but as Morton had a very great disinclination to intrude upon any one, high or low, he knocked before he entered. A voice said "Come in," and accordingly Mr. Morton did as he was bid.

The interior presented a scene somewhat difficult to describe; for it had so many relations with antecedents, to the feelings of those who bore a part in it, that all its interest lay in things that were gone. Abstracted from those, it was but the house of an English peasant, at meal time—one not ill to do, either. At a round oaken table, in the midst of a low-roofed thick-raftered chamber, which had five pots of flowers in each small-paned casement, were seated John Edmonds, his wife, a son of about ten years old, and a daughter of somewhat less than double that term. There had been three children between the two; but the sicknesses of childhood had reduced them to that number; and those that were lost had stored memory with regrets which rendered those that remained doubly dear to the park-keeper and his wife.

Edmonds himself was still a hale, well-looking,

stout man of fifty, long-limbed and active, clothed in a green coat, somewhat the worse for wear, with yellow buttons adorned with a rusty fox, corduroy breeches, and leatherne gaiters up to his knees. A checked handkerchief was round his neck, quite clean, like the collar of his shirt, but with a hole in the corner. There were other holes not shown; but the time had been, not long ago, when he would not have worn a handkerchief with a hole in it on any account. His wife was a plainly but very neatly dressed woman, about three years younger than himself, with considerable traces still remaining of beauty, worn away by daily toil and constant exposure to sun and wind. The boy was a stout, rosy urchin, very like his father, with a merry round face, black eyes, and curly hair. The daughter was one of those sweet flowers sometimes seen in cottage windows, which instantly make one think that they ought to have some better shelter against the wintry wind and burning sun. Her features were fine and delicate; her hair beautiful, and shining like new spun silk; her eyes full of tender and confiding light; her complexion warm yet soft; and her form full both of youthful grace and womanly contour. Small hands, small feet, small lips, all were as symmetrical as if the blood of whole races of patricians had flowed in her veins. Her dress was very plain, and even coarse,

but neat and clean. The time had been when it had been a matter of fatherly vanity or love, to deck that fair form in garments more becoming; but that time had passed, and Lucy Edmonds did not give them a sigh. Her father did, however.

The fare before them was plain but good, and though it had once been better, none of them cared much about that; but two or three of the lozenges in the casement had been broken, and were filled up with paper neatly cut and pasted in, and that was a sad eye-sore to the park-keeper. In other days he would have paid the replacing of the missing panes from his own pocket, if his lord had not done it; but now he could not afford the expense, and he felt the want of neatness bitterly. At that moment he felt it more than ever, when he beheld a stranger, and he had recourse to a little artifice to hide it as much as possible.

No sooner did he perceive who it was that entered than, rising, he gave the young gentleman "Good-morning," and taking a bundle from a chair, which he placed for his visitor with its back to the lattice, he laid the bundle on the window sill, and returned to his seat.

"Good-morning, Mr. Edmonds," said Morton, in reply to the park-keeper's salutation. "I beg your pardon for breaking in upon you at this hour, but I am fond of an early walk, and—"

“Don’t mention it, sir,” said Edmonds, interrupting him, but not rudely; “very happy to see you. Is there anything I can do for you, sir? I have seen you taking your walk before now, and looking about. I am always glad to see any one that takes notice of the park; it was a mighty pretty place once, but it is getting a little out of order now, for want of hands.”

“Why, I wish, with your permission, to walk all over it,” answered Morton, “and should feel very much obliged if you would accompany me. I do not know whether you are aware that there is some talk of the place being sold, and a friend of mine is thinking of buying it.”

This was evidently news to poor Edmonds; and though, for a moment, a good many visions of a nice family purchasing the hall, and of the park being put into good order again, and of all the gravel walks being in trim array, and of the lady’s walk being rolled out twice a week, and of himself being retained as head park-keeper, came before his eyes; yet he did not feel altogether so comfortable as he ought to have been, for there is more of the spirit of clanship in all faithful servants than we know of, and there was something in the idea of Mallington Hall being sold out of the family of Mallington that grated harshly upon his mind.

“ I did not know that it could be sold, sir,” he answered; “ but I have seen so many things I never thought to see, that this does not surprise me. However, sir, I am quite ready to walk with you this moment.”

“ No, no, finish your breakfast, Mr. Edmonds,” replied Morton; “ do not let me disturb you. I am in no hurry,” and entering into conversation first with one and then with another, in a kindly tone; frank, but not too familiar, cheerful, but not jocular, the young gentleman was soon upon good terms with the whole family.

In about five minutes Edmonds and his visitor were upon their feet, and walking out into the park. Up one alley and down another the young gentleman was led, round the walks, across the leas and lawns, through the wilderness, to the obelisk on the hill behind the house.

Much to the satisfaction of the park-keeper, Mr. Morton observed everything with the eye of taste, admired the natural beauties of the place, and again and again expressed his regret at seeing it running wild. At first his companion was well pleased to hear his lamentations over the neglect; but as Morton repeated them several times, he felt as if there were some covert reproach to himself in his words, and he replied, “ Well, sir, it is a pity, surely—a very great pity; but I cannot help

it. In my lord's time I had seven pair of hands under me in this park, besides the three game-keepers who lived outside, and who used to do a turn now and then in the spring and summer; but now there is not a soul to help me, and I myself have no call to do anything, for I am no man's servant now; only I can't bear to see it all going to ruin, so wherever it seems most needed I work away. But I can't keep things right altogether anyhow, all by myself."

"That is quite impossible," said the young gentleman; "but yet it is a terrible pity, indeed, to see so much pains and labour, and so much good taste, as have been employed upon the place altogether thrown away and lost for want of attention. Why, whoever buys the property, if it go on at this rate, will have to spend many hundreds of pounds to put it right again."

"That he will, sir," answered Edmonds. "Before six months be over it will be quite a wilderness; for I must look out for something to do myself. Here, my lord has been dead a good bit more than a year, and I have had but one month's wages from that time. I cannot go on so, sir. All my earnings are going fast enough, I can tell you."

"Well!" exclaimed Morton, as if in a sudden fit of enthusiasm, "I declare I will not see it fall

into such a state. I will tell you what, Edmonds—I will lend a hand."

" You, sir!" cried the park-keeper, looking at him with a smile. " Lord bless you! you could do little enough. Not that I mean to say you are not a strong man, very ; for you are just the sort of made person who would get through a good deal, but you have never been used to such sort of work, I 'll warrant."

The young gentleman laughed merrily. " No, no; you mistake me, Edmonds," he said. " I am not going to take your place over your head. I should have said, I will lend the money, not lend a hand. Then, if my friend does not buy the place, why I suppose I must have it myself—that 's all."

" Ay, sir ; I thought there was something of that," replied Edmonds, shrewdly. " Gentlemen do not come down to look at places for other people, unless they be auctioneers, and such like. Well, I am glad, if it must go, that a gentleman should have it, who seems to like it and value it, and cares about such things."

" But remember, Edmonds," said the young gentleman, putting his finger on his lips, " not a word about this to a living soul, unless it be good Dr. Western—not to your wife or daughter, even ; for the matter is not yet quite settled. But

now to business, Edmonds," and he took out a pocket-book. " You must get four or five hands —not more; for the matter may go off yet, and then, you know, I should be a loser."

" Five good hands, at twelve shillings a week, sir, will make a strange change in no time," answered the park-keeper, " and we have many a poor fellow about here that is now out of work since my lord died."

" Ay, the loss of one wealthy man in a place like this is a misfortune, indeed," said Morton. " Then there are your own wages, Edmonds?"

" Why, I used to have seventy pounds a year, and the house and garden, sir," observed the park-keeper; " but now—"

" Well, call it one pound ten a week," rejoined Morton; " that will make four pounds ten. There are twenty pounds, which will pay all for the next month; and if I should be away when it is done, speak to Dr. Western. He will settle with you. But remember!—not a word to any one else."

" No, no, sir; I will be as mum as a mouse," replied the park-keeper; " but what am I to say, if people ask me?"

" Oh! merely that you have your orders and your money, and that is all you care about," replied Morton.

" But now I should like to see the house, if we

can manage it without letting the folks know what it is for."

"Oh, dear! yes, sir," said the park-keeper, "that is easily done," and leading the way down, he had soon introduced his companion to the old housekeeper, and the three walked over almost every room of the Hall together.

Here and there Mr. Morton stopped and examined everything closely. He looked at the old pictures of the Mallington family. He gazed round the deserted drawing-room with feelings which every one must have known when standing where gay multitudes of happy hearts, long cold, have once tasted the bright hours of life; but he paused long in the library; took down several books and examined them, seeming especially interested in a manuscript volume, which bore upon its back "*History of the Mallington Family.*"

While he was thus employed, the housekeeper and Edmonds stood at the window and looked out. Some of their observations caught the gentleman's ear and he suddenly turned round, when, through the casement, he perceived a young man in a shooting-jacket crossing the park at a couple of hundred yards' distance. He was a tall, powerful, handsome youth, and Mr. Morton inquired, "Who is that?"

"Why, that is Mr. Alfred Latimer, sir," an-

swered the park-keeper, “ the son of Mrs. Charlton on the hill. It’s a pity he goes on so, for I do not think he is so bad at heart after all; and he has always been very kind and civil to me ever since I looked over his shooting a pheasant or two when he was a boy.”

“ Ah! he is a bad one,” said the old house-keeper; “ you always took his part, Edmonds, but he is a bad one, and you’ll find that out some day.—Would you like to look at the kitchens, sir?”

“ No, I thank you,” replied Morton. “ Now, Mr. Edmonds, I will go;” and walking out with his guide he took leave of him, adding, ere they parted, “ I could wish the house taken better care of. They seem to have been cutting off the leaden pipes at the corners.”

“ Ay, that was done by a pack of blackguards last winter,” answered Edmonds.

“ They will commit further depredations if they be not checked,” replied Morton. “ I wish we could have the place better protected, for I am likely to have it just as it stands; but we will think of that hereafter.—Good-day.”

CHAPTER X.

INSTEAD of turning his steps to his own house, Edmonds, the head park-keeper, who had in former days not only acted in that capacity but as head gamekeeper also, and had, moreover, superintended the arrangement of the gardens—for he was a sort of Gilpin in low life—stood upon the terrace before the house for some minutes, as if he were enjoying the beauties of the prospect. The housekeeper, too, remained at the door without closing it, looking after Mr. Morton as he walked away.

“That’s a gentleman, whoever he is, Edmonds,” she said at length, after having passed about two minutes in contemplation.

Edmonds started and turned round; but he agreed heartily in her commendation saying, “Yes, that he is, indeed, Mrs. Chalke; we seldom see such a one in these parts.”

“ I wonder who he is,” rejoined the old lady ; “ do you know, Edmonds ? ”

“ No, that I don’t,” answered the park-keeper. “ Now, I think of it, I did not even recollect to ask his name. But Dr. Western knows, Mrs. Chalke ; for he talked a good deal about the rector, and said he was an excellent man.”

“ And so he is,” replied the good old lady ; “ but,”—and the old lady went on to communicate to Edmonds all her fears and apprehensions regarding her stay at Mallington Hall with none but one housemaid, whom she was obliged to keep herself. “ I declare,” she said, “ that whatever comes of it, I won’t stay another winter here in this way. I am sure I was well nigh frightened out of my life last winter : and if the people who cut off the pipes, and tried to find a way in at the back-door, had known that there was such a quantity of plate in the house, they would have broken in to a certainty—that they would.”

“ Well, before the long nights come,” said Edmonds, “ I will think what can be done ; and, if we can’t manage better, I will come up here and sleep myself. But I must go away now, Mrs. Chalke ; for I want to speak with Blackmore about the garden. Something must be done to get it in order, that’s clear. Why, it’s quite a wilderness.”

“ Ay, that it is,” answered Mrs. Chalke. “ But who is to pay for doing it, Edmonds ?”

“ Why, I don’t know,” answered Edmonds ; “ but I dare say some one will, if it’s done. Whoever the place comes to ought.—Good-day, Mrs. Chalke ;” and he walked away.

Taking his way through the park towards the gate which, as the old lady at the lodge had said, always stood open, he went leisurely on, meditating with no little satisfaction upon the events of the morning. He had by this time become reconciled to the idea of Mallington Park going out of the family, and visions of a thousand pleasant changes, under the auspices of Mr. Morton, presented themselves to his imagination by the way. When he was about two-thirds through the park, he caught a glimpse of the very man he was thinking of seated at the foot of a tree, employed with his paper and pencil in sketching the bridge.

“ He takes a mighty delight in the place, surely,” said the park-keeper to himself ; “ I should like to be able to draw in that way ; it would be so nice to have the house all hung with pictures of the park.—Why, there’s Mr. Latimer coming up to him. I hope he won’t be saucy ; for he’s just as likely to say an uncivil thing as a civil one. No, he seems to be polite enough ; he’s talking to him about his drawing, I dare say. Ay, there

now, he's looking at it,"—and a moment after Morton rose, put the sketch-book in his pocket, and walked away with Alfred Latimer at an easy and sauntering pace.

In the mean while the park-keeper pursued his way, passed through the gate, and following the road which ran from the bridge along the stream under the park wall, reached, at the distance of about a quarter of a mile, a small cottage, built upon the bank of the river, with a little garden round it, occupying the whole space between the highway and the water. It was neatly and beautifully kept; for Blackmore, the gardener, after quitting the service of Mr. Charlton many years before, under circumstances which the reader may recollect, had soon found another place; but at the end of two years had fallen from a tree and broken his thigh, which threw him for many months out of employment. He had then, nearly crippled by the accident, devoted himself to the cultivation of this little piece of ground, and made a scanty livelihood by selling the produce at Mallington. Another great misfortune had befallen him. His son had proved wild, intractable, and idle; and the abilities which had once made his father's heart glad had, by inducing an overweening self-conceit, proved a bane instead of a blessing. At almost any hour of the day, from

sunrise to sunset, Blackmore was to be met with in his garden, and there Edmonds now found him labouring away, in his ordinary working dress, with a sad and thoughtful countenance.

“ Well, Blackmore,” said the park-keeper, after the usual country salutations, “ I think I have got some good news for you.”

“ Indeed !” said Blackmore, looking up. “ I shall be very glad to hear them, Mr. Edmonds ; for I have got some bad news for you, and for every one else in the neighbourhood.”

“ Ay ! what is that ?” demanded Edmonds. “ I was in hopes it was going to turn out a lucky day.”

“ There’s but little luck for me, anyhow,” answered Blackmore ; “ but my news is that Master Alfred has come back again.”

“ Pooh ! is that all ?” exclaimed the park-keeper. “ You are too harsh with that lad, Blackmore : his mother has spoilt him, that’s all. He will soon sow his wild oats, and turn out better than you think.”

“ He’s a bad-hearted young villain !” answered Blackmore, sternly. “ He was bad as a boy, is bad as a youth, and will be bad as a man. There’s no good in him, Mr. Edmonds ; he’s as vain as he’s vicious, and that’s what makes him like to associate with people below himself. It is because he

wishes to be flattered and made a miracle of, and be cock of the walk, that makes him keep company with such folks as my son and Billy Maltby, and others like them. I can forgive and forget all that he did when he was a boy, and all that his mother did too; but I can't forgive his having corrupted my lad John, and made a drunken idle vagabond of him."

"Well, perhaps he will behave better now," said Edmonds. "He has been away for five months, and may have improved."

"Improved!" said Blackmore, in a sullen tone, "he'll never improve. What was the first thing he did when he came back? why, instead of going to his mother's house like any other gentleman, he went down to the Clove Tree, and there he sat drinking and playing dice till two o'clock this morning; so my good woman tells me. Poor thing; he's helped to break her heart, however; for our boy would never have gone on so if it had not been for him: and there he sat winning money from one or two, but losing it preciously to Bill Maltby, and I dare say not very fairly either. Then he went back to the inn to sleep, but Mrs. Pluckrose had had the house shut up, and would not have her people let him in; so he was forced to go home, I suppose: though, they say, he swore at his mother like a graceless young villain, and

damned her I know not how many times before the whole of the raff of the Clove Tree ; because, he said, she had grown stingy, and would not give enough to keep him like a gentleman, or pay his debts."

"That's bad, that's very bad!" said Edmonds. "However, Blackmore, there's no use of talking about him ; I shall give him a lecture when I see him, and he always listens quietly enough to what I say.—What I have to tell you is, that I have got orders at last from some one—I don't know who, but as the money came with them that's all I have to care for—to put the park in order, and I dare say the garden is meant too. Now, as poor old Wilkinson, our head man, died of his cough last winter, I don't see why you shouldn't come up, and see to getting the garden to rights, with any help you can have. Then, being on the spot, you know, you will have a chance of the place."

Blackmore held out his hand to him with a glad smile, exclaiming, "Now that's kind of you, Mr. Edmonds, that's very kind of you ; it's just like you ; and I'll be very glad of the job, whether it goes on or not : for nothing is doing so well as it used to do, and that boy will be the ruin of me, as well as break my heart—that he has done well nigh already. Oh ! Mr. Edmonds, if any one had

told me of him that I was so proud of, because he could do anything almost that he turned his hand to, that he would one day be an idle worthless vagabond, I would have little believed it."

"We should never try to make our children gentlemen, Blackmore," said the park-keeper, "It's a great mistake: it's only grafting a twig on a stock that won't bear it. If there's anything really above the mark in them, it will come out without our help."

"Ah! it was all that Alfred Latimer," said the poor gardener; "he ruined him. I remember well enough when he and I had the quarrel about the melon beds up at Mallington House, and I took him in by the arm; and his mother took his part, though the good old gentleman took mine, and found him out in all his lies. He said he would be revenged some day; and revenged he has been indeed. But here comes John and Bill Maltby. I shan't say much to him, for if I do I may say more than I intend;" and once more shaking the park-keeper by the hand, he walked into the house.

"I'll say something to the young scamp, however," said Edmonds to himself, as the gardener retreated; and waiting calmly at the little wicket of the garden, he watched John Blackmore and his companion sauntering leisurely up with a grave

fixed look that neither of them seemed particularly to like.

The first was a young man of about nineteen, with an air of dirty vulgar finery about him which was anything but prepossessing.

The other was of a very different aspect. He was, perhaps, two or three and twenty years of age, strongly built though spare, broad in the shoulders, thin in the flanks, long in the limbs. His head was small and round as a ball, his hair cut short, but the portion which was wanting on the cranium was made up by the superabundance upon the cheek and under the chin. His features were small and generally well cut. His air was free and bold ; and there was a look of indifferent impudence about his whole aspect, which was only contradicted by the sharp and inquisitive glance of the eye, that seemed to mark everything it fell upon as if with a consciousness of danger. His dress was plainer than that of his companion, but yet fresher and of a more suitable character, consisting of a round jacket of dark cloth, a light coloured waistcoat, a pair of grey trousers, very white stockings, and shoes cut low in the quarter, like those generally worn by sailors.

Edmonds, as I have said, eyed them sternly as they came forward, and his fixed gaze was not pleasant to either party ; but the younger of the

two felt it most, and he looked down upon the ground, while the other returned the stare unabashed, though he whispered a word to his companion with a smile curling his lip, as if in contempt of the good park-keeper.

The latter, however, was not a man to be checked by either looks or speeches, and his eye never winked after it had once settled upon John Blackmore and his companion; and when they came near he said at once, "Well, John, the same courses I find. What will come of it, think you?"

"What should come of it, Mr. Edmonds?" asked the youth.

"Dishonesty, beggary, wickedness, and the gallows, I should think," replied Edmonds.— "Here you are emptying your poor father's pockets, and breaking his heart, and wasting your time; losing your character, if ever you had any; and ruining yourself, body and soul, with a pack of scamps and vagabonds, who first make a fool of you, and then laugh at you."

"What is that, master keeper, you said about scamps and vagabonds?" demanded Billy Maltby, walking a step or two closer to Edmonds, with a look of cold daring.

"I said," replied the keeper, without moving an inch, "that he keeps company with nothing but such."

"Then you mean me amongst the rest," said Maltby, in the same tone.

"At the head of them," replied Edmonds.

"Then take that for your pains!" exclaimed the other, aiming an overhand blow at his head.

But if he was strong and scientific in the noble science of the ring, the park-keeper was stronger and no less skilful; and, instantly parrying the blow with his left hand, he returned it with the right, striking his opponent so hard on the eye, that the surrounding bone seemed to crack under the stroke, and in an instant he was lying on his back on the road. He was up in a second, however, and springing at his opponent with fury, was knocked down again before he could plant a blow. Old Blackmore rushed out of his house at the sound of contention; a stout fellow, who had been one of the under-keepers, ran up from a cottage hard by; and Maltby, with a furious oath, pulled off his coat, called for a ring, and challenged Edmonds to fight it out on the spot.

The park-keeper hesitated for an instant, for the bull-dog spirit of John Bull was strong within him; but, after a brief consideration, he said, "No, I won't—I'm a father of a family, my lad, and have given over such tricks; but I'll tell you what I will do. If ever you are saucy to me again, or if ever I find you lurking about the park or the

covers, I will give you such a hiding as will save some one a deal of trouble; so take care of yourself, that's all; for you 've had a taste, and only a taste; but you shall have as much as you can carry the next time. Come along with me, Wilson, I 've something to say to you," and he walked away with the under-keeper, turning a deaf ear to the taunts and insults which Billy Maltby judged it expedient to pour upon him.

CHAPTER XI.

I MUST now beg the reader to step back with me to the spot where Mr. Edmond Morton sat under a tree, sketching the bridge. There he remained intent, till, turning his eyes a little to the right, in the direction where the keeper's house lay in its little glen, hidden by the trees, he beheld Alfred Latimer coming, with a quick and hurried pace, towards the spot where he had placed himself.

Now, like many other men who have an overweening opinion of their own merits, Alfred Latimer was shy of people at all in his own station of life. His class is a very common one, where pride and vanity are mingled together in such portions as to exacerbate each other, and where the opinion of our own merits is not of that calm and comfortable sort which renders us perfectly sure that every man of sense will esteem and appreciate us as we do ourselves; but, on the contrary, is of the irritable and suspicious kind, which leads us to

fear that our qualities will not be so readily recognised as we think they ought to be. He would not have thought of speaking to Mr. Morton first for the world; that gentleman's dress and appearance, and the high-bred air about him would have been an impassable barrier against such a proceeding. But Morton himself had his own views and purposes; and as he saw the widow's son walking on with a shy glance towards him, he first beckoned to him; and, as Alfred Latimer did not choose to see the sign, he raised his voice and called, taking care not to rise.

“ May I speak with you for a moment?” he said; and the young gentleman, with a quick but unwilling step, approached.

“ Pray, can you tell me,” continued Morton, pointing with his pencil to a spot in the distance, where, following the course of the valley, the eye rested on a tower which seemed that of a church, and then to his sketch, where the same object was represented in a few bold light strokes. “ Pray, can you tell me what is the name of that place?”

“ That is called Steeple Melford,” replied the young man, set at once at ease by the familiarity of the stranger.

“ Is it a town or a village?” asked Morton, going on.

“ Oh! nothing but a little village,” replied Latimer.

mer, looking at his progress. “ How quick you draw.”

“ Habit, habit !” answered Morton ; “ but I think that will do,” and he rose.

“ Why, you do not call that finished, do you ?” demanded the young gentleman ; “ you will never be able to make anything out of that.”

“ Oh ! yes,” replied Morton, “ as you will see, if you call upon me in a day or two at the inn. This is all I want ; and so now I will go back again. You reside here, I think.”

As he spoke he took a step forward, and Alfred Latimer followed him, while replying, “ Yes, I generally do. My mother has a house at the top of the hill there, and when we are good friends I live with her—when we are not I go away.”

“ Why, you never quarrel with your mother, do you ?” said Morton, in a good-humoured tone.

“ No, we don’t exactly quarrel,” answered Alfred Latimer ; “ but sometimes she does not choose to give me money enough, and then I go away, and that is sure to bring her round.”

“ But, perhaps, she cannot afford to give it to you,” said Morton.

“ That is what she says,” replied the other, “ but it is all an excuse. Why, the old man left her very well off, and the guardians allow my sister Louisa twelve hundred a year, and the whole of

that, except two hundred that she keeps for her dress, goes to my mother for the house, so that she could let me have more if she liked, I am sure."

"Perhaps not," rejoined Morton, thoughtfully. "We young men do not always calculate very accurately what our parents can afford. I know your mother; and her establishment is expensive."

"Ay, why does she keep up such a one?" said Alfréd Latimer. "It is upon that and her dress that the money goes. But she won't be without anything that she has a mind to have, and yet grumbles when I want a few pounds. Here, she has had two or three dinner-parties this last week, and pic-nics, and all sort of things, they tell me, and yet when I wrote to her to send me fifty pounds, she vowed she had not got as much in the world, and sent me ten."

"But in that case why don't you apply to some other relation or friend?" inquired his companion. "If the money is absolutely necessary to you to pay a bill, or anything of that kind, I dare say you could easily borrow it."

"Necessary enough, by Jove!" cried young Latimer, "for a fellow in London to whom I owe a small sum threatens to arrest me, so I was obliged to make myself scarce; and, as to borrow-

ing the money, I know no one who has got it to lend. Louisa would let me have it soon enough if she had it; but she sent me all her last quarter's, except ten pounds, six weeks ago, and she will not have any more till the 29th of September, for those old screws, her guardians, are as hard as flint. None of my friends have a *sous* to bless themselves with, and my relations—a set of proud blackguards—take no notice of me because my father chose to marry my mother against their consent—devil fly away with them!"

" You would find it a good plan, Mr. Latimer," said Morton, " to make friends amongst people who can give you assistance in whatever way you may want it; and there are many sorts of assistance much more important and valuable than such a trifle as forty or fifty pounds."

" Ah! I understand what you mean," answered Latimer, " to make acquaintance with fashionable people; but they are all so d—d stupid. They are as cold and dull as lead, and up to no fun; and I doubt much whether they would think forty or fifty pounds such a trifle as you fancy, for they are stingy enough, I can tell you."

" I have not found them so," replied Morton, " and for my own part I am always willing to lend a friend what he wants, as far as my means go, and so," he continued, pulling open the iron gate

of the park, and going out first, "if your mother cannot let you have the fifty pounds you want, I will; for she has been very kind and courteous to me since I have been here; and I should like to make her any return, by assisting her son."

"Upon my life, you are an excellent fellow!" cried Alfred Latimer, who had not the slightest hesitation in regard to borrowing money wherever he could get it. "I will pay you as soon as I can; for I have my own annuity, and in the mean time I will give you my I O U."

Morton smiled, but made no reply, for his young companion's words showed that he was not altogether unaccustomed to the trade of borrowing, and confirmed him in the belief which he had entertained from the first, that the money he was about to lend would never be repaid; and yet, strange to say, he was even, perhaps, the more willing to lend it on that account. "If I can obtain a hold upon this youth," he thought, "and by the loss of a few pounds, lent him from time to time, render him in some degree bound to me by necessity, if not by gratitude, I may, perhaps, disentangle him from his low and vicious companions, and gradually lead him at all events into a better way of life, if not into higher and nobler thoughts. It is worth the while."

Who was he thinking of when he indulged in

these meditations? I suspect, dear reader, that once more Louisa Charlton had something to do with the matter.

However that might be, he walked on, talking with his young companion, over the bridge into the little inn, and up to his own rooms, where, taking the I O U which the other offered, he gave him ten five pound notes, much to Latimer's satisfaction. The borrower was quite ready to leave the lender the moment he had got the money; but Morton detained him for nearly an hour, showing him a portfolio of drawings, and engaging him to talk of various subjects, which, as his heart was opened by what he internally called "his piece of marvellous good luck," he was willing enough to do. On most points he displayed very gross ignorance; for though he had acquired a certain knowledge of Latin and Greek, a smattering of French, and a few other accomplishments, all the more valuable part of education was wanting. Nevertheless, Morton gained one object which he had in view; he obtained, even by his short conference, a great, even an extraordinary influence over Alfred Latimer's mind. There was something in his conversation which entertained and amused the young man, and yet, whether he would or not, commanded his respect. It was light and cheerful, easy

and flowing, but not too familiar; and at the same time, there flowed through it an under-current of strong good sense and high-toned feeling, which never obtruded, but, always apparent, had its effect with gentle and persuasive influence, and sent the youth away thoughtful and inquiring. He felt, for the first time perhaps, that there were other things in life than those he had lived for, and things also that were worth seeking; but, alas! the education from infancy to manhood, if education it could be called, had been given; the tree had received its bent, and it was never to be changed again, though it might be blown about by any strong blast that passed over it.

CHAPTER XII.

THERE was a large dinner party at Mallington House, and the drawing-room was in the usual state in which drawing-rooms are when all the expected company have arrived, and yet dinner has not been announced. It is a period of long pauses, and of gentlemen slowly crossing the room to say three words to ladies at the other side ; and of sundry other inventions for making Time run lightly when he is heavy afoot, and of contrivances for not seeming stupid when one is anything but vivacious. It is a period when conversation, properly so called, is impossible. One may talk, one may speak treason, make love, or offer marriage, or any other of those things which people generally do in private places ; but it is impossible to converse when one is in expectation of being interrupted the next minute. There was in the room a great variety of the human animal ; Mrs. Charlton, now certainly growing the “ stout lady,”

but still not ungraceful ; Louisa Charlton, looking as lovely as one of those gleams of happiness which sometimes come across a monotonous existence, like a sudden burst of sunshine on a chill hill-side, could render her fair face ; a fox-hunting country baronet, a portly man, as fat in his ideas as in his person ; his wife, a very fine lady indeed, and all the finer because she had not always been a fine lady ; their daughter, who was what people usually call a sweet interesting girl—I can describe her no better, for although this book is written for posterity, and it is very probable that posterity (if society improves) may not define a sweet interesting girl exactly as we should at present, yet will there not be dictionaries of the dead tongue of the nineteenth century ? Besides these persons, there were in the room a country gentleman who hunted foxes during the autumn and spring, and found the rest of the year very heavy ; his two sons, who trod in their father's horse's steps, and both of whom intended some day to marry Miss Charlton. There was, moreover, a widow lady of mature years, with her niece, Dr. Western, Mr. Morton, and Alfred Latimer.

Mrs. Charlton had evidently not calculated upon her son's appearance when she invited the rest of the company, for the persons present, in-

cluding herself, formed the ominous number of thirteen. Indeed, the movements of the worthy youth were not always easy to calculate upon ; and it seemed as if he sometimes did violence to his own tastes and propensities, for the especial purpose of preventing people from knowing what he would do next. Now, for the last two years, nothing had been sufficient to prevail upon him to be present at anything like a formal dinner party in Mallington House. It was an annoyance to him ; it was a restraint. His character, half shy, half haughty, scorned and hated the ceremonies and courtesies of life ; but on this occasion, as soon as his mother informed him that such a meeting was to take place, he announced his intention of being present, and was one of the first in the room. As soon as the guests began to arrive he seated himself by Louisa, and talked to her for some time in a low tone. Mrs. Charlton watched them as much as circumstances would allow, and she saw her fair step-daughter colour deeply at something he said, and the moment after perceived a warm smile come upon Louisa's beautiful lip. The next instant the fox-hunter and his two sons were ushered in ; and the graceful mistress of the mansion advanced a step or two to meet the thin wind-cutting elderly man (who came forward with no slight idea of his own importance), and to

welcome his two family jewels. As she passed, she heard Louisa say, in a low voice, "For pity's sake, Alfred, defend me from either or both of them. I think they are the two most unpleasant young men in the whole county."

"What wretches they must be, then!" exclaimed Alfred Latimer, laughing aloud; "but I will defend you, Louisa," and the moment the elder of the youths approached to pay his respects to Miss Charlton, her step-brother addressed him in a jeering tone, but not without a touch of pride in his manner, saying, "So, Mr. Middleton, you broke your fine horse's back, last March, I hear."

"He broke his own back and nearly my neck," replied the young gentleman, somewhat nettled.

"Ay, but it was all your own fault," answered Alfred Latimer; "if you had not pulled him in when you found yourself at the top of the bank he would have gone down as easy as if he had been treading on a Turkey carpet; but he was resolved to go, and you were afraid to let him, and so between you he was killed and you half killed."

Louisa Charlton felt somewhat painfully that it is at times a dangerous thing to trust one's defence to a person on whom we cannot depend; and she could not refrain from saying a few kind and courteous words to medicate the wounds

which she had been unwillingly art and part in inflicting on his own particular vanity.

“Well, Louisa, you are an odd girl!” said Alfred Latimer, as the guest moved away; “you declare you wish to be rid of him, and when I send him away you say all in your power to make him stay.—But here comes the other brother, Edward, and there comes Mr. Morton in at the door. On my life, I have a great mind to deliver you over to Ned Middleton, and exclude the favourite.”

Louisa Charlton was silent, but by no effort that she could command was she able to prevent the warm blood from once more mounting into her cheek at his words, any more than the peach or the nectarine can command its sunny side not to blush under the sun’s rays.

Morton and Edward Middleton advanced almost together, and Louisa observed that Mrs. Charlton whispered a few words to the former, which were merely, “Will you have the kindness, when we go to dinner, to take Louisa?” He bowed his head, with a well-pleased smile; and as the young and inexperienced but clear-minded girl, by a mere casual glance, withdrawn as soon as given, marked his carriage as he crossed the room towards her, she could not help comparing his whole appearance and demeanour with those around, and distinguishing the gentleman, that

rare and excellent thing—the gentleman by feeling and by habit, by nature as well as education, by heart as well as by position—from those who conventionally took the title, but did not possess the character.

Alfred Latimer kept his seat by the side of Louisa Charlton till Morton advanced and shook hands with her in silence, while Mr. Edward Middleton was saying something he thought very fine; then rising, and leaving his place vacant, he drew the young fox-hunter aside, and inquired after his black pointer bitch, adding, with a laugh, “ You had better let me have her, for you do not know how to hunt her.”

While he communicated this pleasant sentiment to his acquaintance, Morton took the chair he had left vacant, and, while he said a few words upon indifferent subjects, Louisa gazed in his face earnestly for a moment, as if there was something of more importance on which she would fain have spoken. She answered somewhat at random too; and Morton with easy self-possession, which is only acquired by much mingling in the world, took advantage of the first of those little bustles which do enliven occasionally *the dull ten minutes*, to give her the opportunity of saying anything she might think fit.

“ You seem as if you had a tale to tell, Miss

Charlton," he said, as Dr. Western and several others moved away to look at some fine drawings to which Mrs. Charlton called their attention.

"No, indeed," answered Louisa, with a warm smile; "but I have heard a tale which would be very gratifying to me if I had not a warning to give. Mr. Latimer, who is my half brother, you know—at least, Mrs. Charlton's son—has told me your great kindness to him this morning; but, but Mr. Morton—I do not really know how to explain myself."

Morton gazed into her beautiful eyes for a moment with a smile, till he saw the colour in her cheek begin to grow a little deeper, and then he said, "Will you let me help you, Miss Charlton?"

"I am afraid you cannot," replied Louisa; "and yet I think it but right to say that which—which——"

"Well, let me try," rejoined Morton; "you know not yet how much of the seer I am; or, in other words, how much insight one honest heart has into another, and how quickly a man of the world perceives the circumstances of those with whom hemingles. You would warn me, then, my dear Miss Charlton, that the money will never be repaid."

"No, no," said Louisa, "not exactly that, for

that I could insure myself; but I merely wished to hint, that Alfred might trespass upon your kindness too far, and inconsiderately borrow more than he could ever repay. He is already much in debt, I am sorry to find; and I feared that you might be a loser, perhaps, of more than——”

Once more she paused; and Morton finished the sentence for her, saying, “More than I can afford.—You will think me a strange personage, Miss Charlton, when I tell you, that I lent this money with the full knowledge, or at least belief, that it would never be repaid; and I should be quite ready to lend a much larger sum, with the same conviction, for the same object.”

“Nay, why should you do that?” exclaimed Louisa Charlton.

The servant almost at the same instant announced that dinner was on the table; and Morton merely replied in a low voice, “Do you not think I would do much more to save from perdition a person nearly connected with one I love?”

Louisa’s hand trembled as she took the arm which Morton offered, and her steps tottered as he led her towards the door. All the three **Misters** Middleton looked surprised and offended at the young stranger taking such bold possession of the heiress; and the father asked his eldest son, “Who the devil is that fellow?”

"Some painter, they say," replied the heir-apparent, with a shrug of the shoulders; and he walked forward to give his arm to the baronet's daughter, the sweet interesting girl, while his father advanced to escort the baronet's wife.

Poor Louisa Charlton!—At the first step of the stairs her head whirled, and her thoughts were all in confusion; at the second, her heart beat so vehemently she thought she must have dropped; at the third she asked herself if her ears had not deceived her; at the fourth, though she was quite certain Morton had spoken those words, she felt sure that she had mistaken their import; at the fifth, she recollects that Alfred Latimer was nearly connected with many persons whom she did not know, and that Edmond Morton might very likely love one of them; at the sixth, she had quite settled the matter to her own satisfaction; and though she did not believe one word of the hypothesis she had set up, and did believe that Morton loved her a little, and would have been very sorry to have believed that he loved any one else more, yet, as it suited her purpose to fancy that she had mistaken him, she persuaded herself that it was so. How continually we lie to our own heart. Here below, each individual has some eight or ten millions of persons to deal with, more or less directly; and, by the best statistical tables of lying,

it may be calculated, that at least one-half of those eight or ten millions are trying to cheat him to the best of their ability ; but the aggregate amount of lying practised on him by all the men whom he knows or has to do with, is very inferior to that which he practises on himself.

By this art Louisa Charlton made herself quite comfortable for the time, and the last steps down stairs were passed calmly and quietly. She had even recovered herself so far ere they reached the dining-room door as to say, “ You are very kind ; but I fear Alfred is more deeply plunged in debts and difficulties than you think.”

“ Perhaps they may be made the means,” answered Morton, “ of rescuing him from worse evils. I will try to explain how during dinner, if I have an opportunity.”

The meal passed over as such things usually do. The appearance of the crops was discussed. Some of the cases at quarter-sessions were talked of. There had been an earthquake about that time in the West Indies, and a pig had been born in a neighbouring parish with two heads. Both proved very serviceable on the present occasion ; but while the pig was upon the carpet, Morton found the moment he was looking for, and explained to Louisa Charlton his views and his plans in regard to Alfred Latimer. He showed her that

the love of low society had taken possession of Mrs. Charlton's son; and he went on to express a hope that if he could obtain some influence over his mind, he might either lead him without discussion, or persuade him by reason, to seek the company of men in his own station. He was compelled to be very brief; but everything was clear and definite, just and reasonable; with a sufficient portion of enthusiasm, subdued and studiously kept out of sight, to excite admiration and regard in his fair hearer, and with sufficient tenderness of tone and manner to make her heart beat a very little, but not to agitate her enough to be at all unpleasant.

The private tone in which Mr. Morton and Miss Charlton had been speaking during dinner, had not escaped observation, and some of the younger gentlemen at the table, who would have preferred enjoying the same degree of intimacy themselves, were rather inclined to be impertinent to the supposed painter. The baronet himself, and the elder Mr. Middleton, treated him coldly and proudly—condescended to address a few words to him, indeed, but affected to confine them entirely to the subject of the arts. Morton was exceedingly amused, and humoured them to the top of their bent; for he had heard the report of his supposed profession, and had done his best to encourage it.

Good Dr. Western, however, was destined to spoil his sport, with the gentlemen present at least; for the worthy rector could not make up his mind to say or imply what was untrue, even for a jest; and when Sir Simon Upplestone asked him directly who and what Mr. Morton was, adding, “People say, doctor, that he is merely a poor artist. Now you know, doctor—” the rector interrupted him, for fear he should say something more disagreeable still, replying, “He is a gentleman, sir, in every respect, by birth, education, and fortune; though he certainly deserves the name of an artist, as far as drawing better than many who make it their profession, can entitle him to that distinction.”

Morton caught the sense of the doctor’s reply, if not the exact words, and was vexed with him; and the evening, as he expected, passed very dully from that moment.

CHAPTER XIII.

LOUISA CHARLTON slept little during the night after the dinner party of which we have just spoken. While conversation was going on around her, and lights dazzled her eyes, and the siren songs of her step-mother who had not yet lost one note of her sweet voice, rang in her ears, and Morton was by her side, the delusion which she practised on herself lasted with sufficient power to prevent her from examining closely the realities which she hesitated to contemplate. Let it not be supposed that she fully believed that which she thought fit to fancy for the time. Oh, no! As I have before said, she knew at the bottom of her heart that it was not so; but do we not sit in the box of a theatre, and see men whom we have often beheld, in homely apparel, now tricked out in gold and velvet, enacting kings and princes, with scenes around them representing forests and palaces, tented fields, and royal courts; and though

we know the men and women to be very humble folks, often denied, by the senseless usages of the proud cold world, the very respect which genius of any kind should always command, and though we are well aware that the glittering pageantry in which they move is but thin lath and painted pasteboard, yet we find no difficulty in shutting out the undoubted truth from our own consideration, and see and hear and know nothing but what we are inclined to believe—till we have left the theatre, and reflect calmly over all that we have beheld. Thus Louisa Charlton would not know what she knew—would not believe what she actually believed—would not (contrary to all her usual habits) look the truth in the face. But as soon as she was alone and in silence, and the curtain of darkness drawn around, the communing with her own heart began. First, what was it that Edmond Morton really meant? She could no longer deceive herself—she was loved! It was not alone the few words he had spoken before dinner, but many others—not so plain, but plain enough—which he had spoken before. It was not alone words either, but looks, and tone, and manner. She could not doubt it—she did not doubt it; and, turning her face to her pillow with a glowing cheek, she asked herself if she did not love in return? Oh! what a tumult then was felt in her

young breast; how confused and wild seemed all her thoughts! Mind would not answer what the heart spoke clearly enough; and for many minutes she dared not admit, even to herself, how deeply, how wholly, how warmly she returned the affection of one whom she had not known a month. The truth, however, made itself heard at length; but then she blamed herself that it was so. There seemed something to her eyes rash, imprudent, almost wrong, in yielding to such sensations; for she knew not that they are not dependent upon will but are gifts—ay, bright and excellent gifts from God who made us—to be regulated, not to be resisted—to guide us to happiness, if wisely exercised. The truth, however, on this score also made itself felt ere long, and when she thought of him she loved—of how different he was from every one she had previously seen—how high, yet gentle in his bearing—how noble and generous in his words and thoughts—how graceful in person and in manner—how perfect in all the qualities which win attachment and insure respect—she almost ceased to blame herself for loving, and loving hastily.

But then came the thought that he had never yet plainly spoken his attachment to her; he had but implied that he loved—he had not said it—and, for an instant, wild fears took possession of

her. She had heard that men can trifle with woman's affection. She remembered the boy and the butterfly, and the very idea of all she felt being repaid by, perhaps, desertion and ingratitude was terrible. But then, when she remembered Edmond Morton's words on many occasions, when she thought of little traits which she had marked, and which speak the heart more than professions or set speeches, she was angry at herself for doubting him. Imagination—fertile in ways of tormenting, as well as in ways of blessing—filled her mind with a thousand other agitating thoughts, and kept her waking till the shrill drawing-room clock struck three. She did not hear the next hour, but, some time after, she started up as if in fear, and saw the morning light streaming through the shutters.

Looking at her watch she found it half-past five, and rising, with a mind still troubled with the thought that even yet Edmond Morton had not justified her in feeling as she felt towards him, she dressed herself without ringing for her maid, resolved to walk down in the fresh early morning, and take breakfast with Dr. Western and Mrs. Evelyn. She thought that their society might calm her; not that she proposed for one moment to make them sharers of the thoughts that agitated her bosom; but there is something in the conver-

sation of the good and wise which, like those excellent remedies physicians talk of that heal wounds by giving tone and vigour to the whole constitution, soothe and medicate even the anxieties and sorrows which are not exposed to the eye. The morning was bright, though there were passing clouds. Her head ached a little with a restless night, and she thought of the fresh air and the cool shade of the tall trees with eager longing ; but she was obliged to wait for a time till some of the household were up, for she was dressed before half-past six. At length the sound of moving tables from below, and feet upon the stairs, told her that the housemaids at least were stirring, and, as her own habits were early, her maid soon after appeared. She was not surprised to find her young mistress up, and prepared to go out, for it had happened often before from other causes ; and leaving word that she was gone down to Dr. Western's, Louisa issued forth, and walked quietly through the lanes and fields, pausing every now and then, with her cottage bonnet in her hand, to enjoy the morning breeze, and the prospect that opened here and there through the trees to the river and Mallington Park. But ever and anon, together with the sensation of enjoyment, came a certain undefined feeling of apprehension. Perhaps, it ought rather to be called anxiety ; for

it was not that she feared anything, but rather that she suddenly remembered, whenever she paused to taste the calm and unmixed pleasures which had been the brightness of her youth, that she loved; and that though she believed, though she was sure, that she was loved in return, yet the words had not been spoken that fully justified her in loving; and gradually she fell into a deeper fit of meditation, which led her to prolong her walk along the bank of the stream, knowing that Mrs. Evelyn would not be down before eight.

At length, as she came close upon the edge of the stream, choosing the green border of turf that separated it from the road, she saw a little fisherman, some nine or ten years old, casting his line into the water. The boy turned his warm face at her step, and recognising the son of Edmonds, the park-keeper, she gave him a smile and a nod, and was walking on. The boy, however, put his hand to his hat, half swinging round to bow to the young lady, when missing his footing, after a momentary struggle to save himself, he fell headlong into the stream. On the impulse of the moment, without pausing to consider how deep the river might be in that part, Louisa darted forward with a scream for help, and plunged in. She knew, indeed, that it was shallow above, but a mill-stream joined the little river a few yards

higher up, and in a moment she felt the water circle over her head. Giddy and confused, with the green light flashing in her eyes, and the water rushing in her ears, she was rising again to the surface, when suddenly she felt a strong arm cast round her waist, and ere she well knew what had happened, was laid gently upon the grass.

“ Oh, Louisa ! Oh, my beloved girl ! ” cried the voice of Edmond Morton.

“ The boy ! the boy ! the poor boy ! ” exclaimed Louisa, raising herself on her knees ; and without further entreaty Morton plunged into the river again. But young Edmonds was in little danger comparatively. He knew something though not much of swimming, and he held fast by his fishing rod, showing both skill and presence of mind in so employing it as to keep his head above the water. With two strokes Morton reached him, and, catching him under the shoulder, soon landed him in safety. The boy shook himself like a wet dog, and seemed in no degree the worse ; but Louisa was pale as death, more, indeed, with fear than anything else. To her Morton turned then, and, supporting her tenderly on his arm, he led her gently towards the rectory ; but as they went he whispered words which were better calculated to restore the quick beating of Louisa’s heart than any of all the excellent inventions of the Humane Society.

CHAPTER XIV.

HER heart beat—oh, how it beat as he led her on! She could not answer a word, for if faintness and dizziness had not taken from her the power of speech, the overwhelming sensations which his words called forth would have left her voiceless. They were all joyful, it is true ; but yet, while they made her very very happy, they showed her how much she had doubted, how much she had dreaded—they showed her, more than all, how much she loved. Even that was enough to agitate and overpower her, and for several minutes she seemed as it were in a dream. The drowning boy, the plunge into the stream, the waters closing over her head, the sudden and unexpected rescue, the words of earnest and passionate love,—all seemed parts of some wild strange vision : and twice she turned faintly round, and gazed in Morton's face as if to assure herself that it was all true indeed.

The languid fall of her eyelids, the feebleness

of her step as he supported her onward,—all made her companion conclude that she was scarcely able to proceed; and as they came to a spot where a rustic bench had been placed upon the bank of the stream, between two tall elms, he led her to it, and, kneeling at her feet, held her hand in his, gazing up into her face with looks of tenderness and apprehension.

“ Speak to me, my Louisa,” he said, “ but one word to tell me you are better! Oh! you do not know what it is, Louisa, to see the being you most love on earth nearly perish before your eyes! You know not how one longs to hear the dear voice again! You cannot tell, you cannot comprehend, what are my feelings towards you this moment, just saved from death.”

“ Not now, Morton, not now,” answered Louisa at length. “ I do comprehend, I do know, but do not agitate me now.”

“ I will not,” he said, pressing his lips upon her hand, “ I will not utter another word of love. I have been wrong—I have been unkind. I should have chosen a fitter season; but it burst forth without my will. I will be so selfish no more.”

“ Selfish!” exclaimed Louisa, the tears rising in her eyes. “ You selfish! Oh, no, you are all that is generous and kind.”

She said no more, but Morton was content, as well he might be, for he knew her who spoke, and

was aware that those words could not be light ones. He might be anxious, indeed, to hear more—to tell the tale of love fully, and to win the kind reply—but he really felt what he had said, that it was ungenerous to add anything to her emotions at such a moment; and, turning from the topic of his love, he sought, tenderly and wisely, to soothe and calm her; and knowing well where the great source of all mental strength, the only fountain of true tranquillity and confidence, is to be found, he said, “For how much have we to thank God, Louisa, that one who was able to save you should be wandering accidentally by the river at this early hour. How much comfort, how much joy do those lose who attribute—I may say madly—every event of life to accident or some blind necessity!”

“They do, indeed,” said Louisa; “and that you should be the person, too,” she added, thoughtfully, but she did not end the sentence, feeling that she was approaching that upon which she feared to touch. Not, indeed, that her heart at all wavered; not that she was doubtful. She loved with the first full confiding affection of woman’s nature; she loved the only man whom she had ever met, who seemed in her eyes worthy of her love; and she had no hesitation in the present, no dread for the future. But yet there was a something that made her

shrink from the avowal of all she felt. Were I writing for women alone, it would be unnecessary to add a syllable, for all have felt, or will feel, as she felt; but these are sensations little understood by men. We seldom, very seldom, know the emotions too powerful for speech, for contemplation, almost for endurance; and more seldom still, when we do experience them, are they with us those of joy. Rarely, too—oh, how rarely! especially when the early and light timidity of youth is past, and we are capable of feeling the deeper and stronger passions of the heart—rarely have we any of that reluctant dread of owning even to ourselves the sensations that master us. But women—all women worthy of the name—have been affected as Louisa Charlton was at that moment; all women have hesitated to unveil their heart even to him who possessed it most entirely—ay, more to him, perhaps, than to any other.

Morton pressed her not to say more, and after some few words to while away a moment of repose, he asked, “Can you go on now, Louisa; or shall I run to Dr. Western’s and bring some conveyance for you? I fear to let you sit here longer, wet and agitated as you are.”

“Oh, no, no!” she answered; “do not leave me. I shall be better in a moment.”

But even as she spoke they were joined by a

third person, a perfect stranger to both ; but one who seemed not inclined to be long a stranger in any society into which he might be thrown. He was a slim man of about five or six and thirty, with a profusion of dark hair and whisker, curled in the most exquisite manner, a sweet and simpering countenance, and a complexion peculiarly delicate and clear : in short, a pretty, a very pretty man. He wore a blue coat, rather pale in the hue, with gilt buttons, a yellow waistcoat, and a blue satin handkerchief round his neck, spotted with amber flowers. The rest of his dress was in the same fine taste. His air was perfectly jaunty and self-satisfied, and as he walked along the bank of the river, before he perceived Louisa and her lover, he rose upon the tips of his toes, as if his elevated opinion of himself required some external demonstration.

As soon as he cast his eyes upon the young lady, however, and perceived, from the very evident signs displayed by her dripping garments and dishevelled hair, that some accident had happened, he approached with a hurried step, exclaiming, “Goodness, ma’am ! you must have tumbled into the water !—you are not drowned, I hope !—what a mercy ! But your complexion will be spoilt if you sit in the sun all wet. I dare say you are faint, too : let me recommend you some of the

unparalleled Droitwich smelling salts ;" and regardless of some impatience in Morton's look, and some surprise and reluctance in Louisa's, he brought forth from his pocket first a corked and sealed bottle, then a small steel cork-screw, and having opened the precious vial, held it to her nose till she gently removed it, saying that she was better.

" Pray hold it yourself, ma'am," he cried ; " I know I am clumsy : it will revive you in a moment, I am quite sure it will !" and, not to seem ungrateful, Louisa took it at his request.

But no sooner had she done so than his hand dived into his pocket again, and forth he brought another bottle, longer, thinner, and wrapped up, in paper covered over with talismanic signs.

" Let me call your attention to this article, ma'am," he said, " and yours too, sir. This is Mrs. Grimsditch's vegetable anti-corrugent dew of jonquille, a sovereign preservative against wrinkles, sun-burning, freckles, moles, discolourations, heat-spots, scars, or any other of the great enemies of beauty. It softens, refreshes, nourishes, polishes, and blanches the skin, gives an agreeable coolness to the complexion, against which the sun of India itself cannot contend, and——"

" The lady does not require it, sir," said Morton, somewhat sharply ; " and, at all events, this

is not a moment in which she can attend to its virtues."

"Nay, sir, no offence, I hope," said their undesired companion. "As to not requiring it, every one requires it; the young and beautiful to preserve their loveliness, and others who are somewhat faded to restore the charms they have lost."

Morton felt inclined to knock him down; but he remembered the barber of Bagdad, and took patience while the other went on.

"I did but wish to offer my poor services, sir, either to the lady or yourself; and seeing you both in a——"

"The only service, sir, you can render us," said the young gentleman, interrupting him, "is to run as fast as you can along that path, past the church, on to the rectory; and to beg Dr. Western to send his carriage, saying that this lady, his ward, has met with a little accident, and——"

"Oh, no, no; you will alarm them!" cried Louisa.

But the stranger, without attending to her, set off good-humouredly at full speed towards the rectory; and Louisa turned to Morton with the first smile that had brightened her face that morning, saying, "Let us go; I can go now, and that strange man will frighten our good friends."

"He seems an impertinent puppy," answered

Morton, " though a good-humoured one. But are you really able to walk, dearest Louisa?"

" Oh, yes," she replied, " he has done me good, do you know; for he has made me laugh, when I felt more inclined to cry."

" To cry!" said her lover, drawing her arm through his, as she rose to proceed.

There was both surprise and sadness in his tone; and, fearful that she had grieved him, Louisa answered, " Yes, Morton, to weep. But do you not know that we women as often weep when we are happy as when we are sorrowful? and I am very happy; happy in all that has occurred; happy in my deliverance, and that you effected it."

The warm blood glowed in her cheek as she spoke, and the last words were uttered with down-cast eyes, and in a low tone. They were somewhat similar to those she had before spoken; but the repetition of them was very pleasant to her lover's ear.

" It was indeed most fortunate, my Louisa," he said, as they walked slowly on, " that I was passing at the time; and yet it was a mere accident, brought about by repentance for a fault I committed last night."

" Indeed!" cried Louisa, with a look of surprise, " I saw no fault."

" And yet I was guilty of a great one towards

you, dearest girl," replied her lover. "The thought of it broke my rest, and made me rise at day-break, and go out to wander about till I could repair it. I felt that I was wrong, Louisa, to speak words of love at such a moment as I did last night, when I could tell nothing, explain nothing, and you could make no reply. I feared that I might have agitated, perhaps pained you; and that, whether my hopes were false or true, I might have disturbed your repose. You know all now; and of one thing be sure, my Louisa, that I would never have ventured to seek your love, if by station and fortune I were not in a position to justify me in so doing."

"And do you imagine, Morton," asked Louisa, with a look almost reproachful, "that station or fortune would make any difference in my regard? It is true I am not a romantic person, and I know that competence is necessary to happiness; but where it is to be found on one side it is sufficient. My dear father taught me to value other things than wealth or rank, and I have not forgotten his lessons."

"I am sure you have not, my Louisa," replied her lover, "and of you I entertained no doubt; but there are friends and guardians to be thought of too, dear girl, and they judge alone by the customs and conventionalities of society. The

poor artist, which the good people here, it seems, give me out to be, would be naturally, perhaps not improperly, rejected as the suitor to the wealthy heiress; while the man of fortune, to whom her riches are no object, would be accepted by the wise men who have her happiness in trust, though the one might be worthy of her, the other not."

"It seems to me very strange and very wrong that it should be so," replied Louisa, thoughtfully; "for to the one her fortune might be beneficial, enabling him to pursue a high and bright career, to cultivate his abilities, and to advance the very arts which are a glory and a benefit to his country; while in the hands of the other it would be but of little service to himself or his fellow-creatures."

"It is as well in our case," answered Morton, "that, as objections might be raised against your desire by those who would think they were acting conscientiously in opposing your marriage with a poor man, no valid obstacle of that kind does exist; and I tell you that such is the case at once, dear girl, not because it would make any difference in your eyes whether I were the poor artist or not, but because I think it may set your mind at ease in regard to the opposition of others."

"I must not take credit to myself," answered Louisa Charlton, "for having thought you the

poor artist, Morton ; for though I did so for a few days, I was soon convinced that report was false, and yet, I think, Mrs. Charlton believes so still."

" Do not undeceive her, my Louisa," exclaimed Morton, eagerly ; " I have my own views on that point, and have encouraged the idea. Pray, do not contradict it to any one. You shall hear, whenever we have a moment or two for private conversation, every particular of my fate and history ; for from her I love I can have no concealment. But we have not time now ; for here comes the good rector's carriage at full speed. In the mean time, Louisa, know me as nothing but as report gives me out, and let me see what will be the end of the game that is playing ; for you as well as I must perceive, that the conduct of some persons very near you is not altogether natural."

He had no time to say more, for at that moment the carriage of the worthy rector pulled up beside them, and the doctor himself got out in eager haste, followed by the stranger of the smelling bottle and cosmetic.

" Why, what is this, my dear child ?" exclaimed the worthy clergyman. " What is this, Mr. Morton ? Both wet ; but I see how it is, I understand it all."

" Not all, I think, my dear sir," replied the

young gentleman ; and he proceeded to give their friend a brief account of all that had occurred.

“ Ah, Louisa, Louisa !” cried the good rector, shaking his finger at her, “ impulse, impulse ! you women always act from impulse, and peril your own selves without a chance of assisting others. But what has become of the poor boy ? He might be drowned while Morton was assisting you.”

“ Oh, no !” replied Louisa’s lover ; “ he remained struggling gallantly, and seemed to have some idea of swimming ; but his fishing-rod was his best friend, keeping his head above water till I could return, and draw him out. He is the son of Edmonds, the park-keeper, I think ; and as soon as he was on dry land set to work to wind up his line as if nothing had happened.”

They were by this time so near the rectory that Louisa would not get into the carriage, but walked on still leaning on her lover’s arm, and accompanied by Dr. Western ; while the man in the blue satin handkerchief coolly mounted the box of the carriage and rode back, apparently making himself quite at home.

lost, every exciting vision treasured up. He longed for a wild and free existence—for deeds of adventure and intense passion. Virtue, honour, respectability, what were they to him? Names! cold, tame, unmeaning names! He took no resolution, he formed no scheme, indeed; but the impression was given to cast off all restraint, to follow out the passions of his own heart, only more boldly, more rashly. There was a higher, a more intense tone yielded to his character, but nothing was changed. He had hitherto been led; his aspiration was now to lead—but it was in the same course. He had hitherto been wilful in his own conduct; he was now eager to work his will on others—but the end and object was unchanged. He had sought excitement in all that he had done; he sought excitement still, but of a more intense and vehement character. He sat with that book in his hand far longer than he had ever been known to read before, and he only laid it down when the clock struck nine; and he rose saying to himself, “It is time for her to rise. She shall find that I will not be trifled with any more;” and ringing the bell sharply, he told the servant, who appeared at its loud summons, to send his mother’s maid up to her room with a message to the purpose that he wished to speak with her immediately. The man retired to obey his orders; but

nearly half an hour elapsed without any one appearing, and Alfred Latimer's impatient spirit wrought turbulently within him at the delay. At length, working himself up into a fit of passion, he hurried out of the library, and was mounting the stairs, when he met the maid coming down to give him notice, that Mrs. Charlton awaited him in her dressing-room.

“In Heaven’s name! what is the matter, Alfred?” demanded Mrs. Charlton, as soon as he entered. “Something must have gone wrong, or I am sure you would not have disturbed me at such an early hour——”

“As nearly ten o’clock?” asked Alfred Latimer. “Well, you are quite right: something has gone wrong, everything has gone wrong, and I must have it put right. You know I asked you for fifty pounds yesterday——”

“And I told you, my dear boy, that I had not got it to give,” answered Mrs. Charlton, in a soothing tone.

“You have plenty of money to give parties with, and fine wines, and all sorts of things from London; and to keep horses, and carriages, and servants enough, to do nothing,” replied her dutiful and affectionate child.

“Alfred, Alfred!” cried his mother, “I never thought I should hear my son, for whom I have

sacrificed so much, speak such words. You know quite well the horses and carriages are Louisa's, not mine. Almost all the servants are hers: and does my own son grudge me the comforts of my home, and even the respectable appearance which I am obliged to keep up?" and Mrs. Charlton wiped away a tear.

"This is all very good, mother," replied Alfred; "but necessity has no law, and money must be found; for money I must have."

"If I could have found it," said Mrs. Charlton, "you should have had it. Do you think, if I could have procured it, I would have put off my journey to London? But every farthing I had, except just enough for the expenses of the house, I was obliged to pay, because those people, the Marsons, chose to fail, and force me to pay the horrid bill I had there—four hundred pounds at one blow! Only wait till Louisa is of age, or till I have carried out what I have in view with regard to her, and you shall have as much as you can desire."

"I cannot wait, and will not wait," replied Alfred Latimer, fiercely. "I have bills to pay as well as you, and they must be paid, too. Why should you not sell, or pawn, some of all your smart jewels? They would soon raise the money; and you are a widow now, and don't want them."

Now Mrs. Charlton was fond of jewels, and had

accumulated no inconsiderable store ; but still she thought that if the sum required was but fifty pounds, she could part with some for her dear boy's sake.

“ You are unkind, Alfred,” she said ; “ but to show you that I would do anything I can to help you, I will raise the fifty pounds upon some of the trinkets poor Mr. Charlton gave me.”

“ Fifty pounds !” cried her son. “ That would have done yesterday, but it will not do to-day. I have many bills to pay that cannot be put off. One man threatens to arrest me, and another has actually taken out a writ. Now I will be free of all this without further delay. I will have my debts paid ; I will have something over to start upon ; and then——”

“ But what is the amount ?” demanded the lady, in consternation.

“ A thousand pounds will do, I think,” replied Alfred Latimer, coolly.

“ A thousand pounds !” exclaimed Mrs. Charlton, and throwing herself back in her chair, she added, in an altered tone,—“ You cannot have it, Alfred.”

“ Indeed !” he said, with his eyes flashing fire.

“ No !” she replied, decidedly. “ I have told you—and so it must be. You cannot have it ; and if you think to frighten me into supplying

your extravagance and folly at this rate, you are mistaken. I wish you had not disturbed me out of my sleep to hear such nonsense ; ” and Mrs. Charlton yawned.

There was some reality in her demeanour, and a good deal that was assumed ; for she thought that he had taken a peremptory tone merely to alarm her, which could only be met by a cool one ; but she was not quite prepared for what was to follow. His manner, too, altered ; he set his teeth close, as if afraid of giving way too far to the strong passion within him, and approaching his mother’s chair, he said in a low bitter tone,—“ So you will not sell your diamonds for the relief of your son ? ”

“ Not one,” answered Mrs. Charlton.

“ Well, then, you will never see him again,” said the young man.

“ Pooh ! ” said Mrs. Charlton, “ you know better ; ” but without another word he turned to the door, and went out, closing it quietly behind him.

Mrs. Charlton was somewhat alarmed ; for, though she had often seen fits of violent passion in Alfred Latimer, she had never beheld any effort to repress the expression of his rage. If he had cursed and sworn, she could have felt quite easy ; if he had banged the dressing-room

door as he retired, it would have been a relief. But the stern low tone, the shut teeth, the quiet exit, had something awful in them; and after pausing for a few minutes in consideration, she rose and rang her bell. Before the maid could appear, she heard a horse's feet over the gravel, and, looking out, saw her son riding away from the house on a horse that was always kept for him at Mallington; and when her abigail entered, Mrs. Charlton merely said,—“ Do my hair.”

In the meanwhile Alfred Latimer rode on down the village, and approached the road that ran along by the bank of the stream; but as he was in the act of turning his horse's head as if to follow that path, he suddenly pulled up, thought for a moment, and then, crossing the bridge, approached the park gates. There he dismounted, tied his beast to the iron bars, and walked with a rapid step in the direction of the park-keeper's house.

CHAPTER XVI.

THERE was a shady grove in Mallington Park, where the trees were tall and thin in the stem, having been suffered to run up close together; and, as ambition appears even to extend to vegetable life, wherever such is the case, each seems to struggle to overtop the other, and get a greater portion of the sunshine than is its due. There was no underwood, except here and there a bush of holly, in which occasionally a stout old cock pheasant would take up his abode, and the wind sighed at liberty through the bolls of the beeches. Many a winding path, too, had been cut through the grove, wandering in and out amongst the trees, and leaving sufficient space for two persons to walk abreast, but not more; and occasionally a sudden peep of the distant country had been afforded by taking down a tree, which was lost again in a moment as one passed on.

In this grove, about the hour of eleven, or a little after, on the day of which I have just been

speaking, two persons were walking on slowly together along the paths in earnest conversation. Hither and thither they went from one walk to another, but never issued beyond the cover of the trees. They went hand in hand, too, and one spoke eagerly and rapidly, while the other replied little, but by sighs. They were Alfred Latimer and Lucy, the fair young daughter of the park-keeper, Edmonds—a dangerous companionship for her. He seemed pressing her vehemently to some step which she was unwilling to take, and ever and anon she raised her eyes, full of tears, to his, and answered,—“ No, Alfred ; no, I cannot. Oh, do not ask me, Mr. Latimer. It would break my father’s heart, if I were to leave him without telling him where I am going.”

“ And you will break mine if you refuse, Lucy,” replied Alfred Latimer ; “ you can write to him to-morrow, and tell him you are with me, and that we are going to be married as soon as ever we can be.”

But Lucy shook her head mournfully, saying, “ He will not believe that.”

“ And you doubt it, too, Lucy !” cried Alfred Latimer, vehemently ; “ you think I would break my oath ! You do not love me, Lucy, that is very clear. Nay, do not cry now ; you will make your eyes red, and every one will see.”

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Lucy Edmonds wiped the tears away, and replied in a low voice, " You know I love you —you know it too well, or you would not ask me to do what is wrong."

" But it is not wrong," answered Alfred Latimer; " I tell you that I have had a quarrel with my mother, so that I cannot stay any longer here, or we would be married at once; and yet you refuse to go and marry me as soon as it can be done."

" Oh, no," said Lucy; " I only refuse to go with you without my father's knowledge. You know, Alfred, it would be very wicked, and I should never be happy after."

" And so you will really make me unhappy for ever, Lucy?" asked the young gentleman; for you will never see me more, after I have once gone away. Come, Lucy, come—go back quietly to the house, get some few things ready, and meet me in two hours at the other side of the park;" and bending down his head, he kissed her.

" I cannot—I cannot," answered Lucy Edmonds, weeping. " Without my father's leave I cannot come."

Alfred Latimer's cheek was somewhat red; and even to her he could not repress the quick and angry flash of his eye at anything like opposition. But before he could utter many words,

issuing suddenly from one of the side paths, Lucy's father himself stood before them. The good man's brow was stern and dark, and his lip quivering with many mingled emotions.

"Let go my daughter's hand, sir," said Edmonds, after gazing at him for an instant; "and never you set your foot in this park again."

"Indeed!" cried Alfred Latimer, with a sneer. "Methinks I shall require to be warned off by some better authority than Master Edmonds, formerly Lord Mallington's park-keeper; if you come to that, what business have you in this park yourself?"

"I have business enough, and authority enough for my purpose," replied Edmonds, taking his daughter's hand, and drawing her to him, "and that you will find, sir. I knew you to be bad enough long ago, but I did not think you were so base as to seek to ruin this poor girl."

The young gentleman gazed at him for an instant with a fierce look, and then turned his eyes to Lucy, who stood by her father, with her limbs shaking, and her face drowned in tears. That sight seemed to move him, and he said,— "I did not seek to ruin her. It is not true. I intended to marry her—ay, immediately."

"False! false!" cried Edmonds. "You told her you would marry her, I don't doubt, but

when you had once got her in your power it would have been a different tale."

"No, it would not," replied Alfred Latimer; "I would have married her, and I will."

"No, that you shall not," replied Edmonds, sternly. "You are no husband for my daughter, sir; keep in your own station—marry in your own station. So shall she, please God. I would a great deal rather see her the wife of an honest labourer than the wife of a dishonest gentleman. I don't mean to say you are so—that I know nothing about; but I do know that you would not make her happy, and so you should not have her, even if all your fine speeches were true. Come along, Lucy—come with me;" and, drawing her away, he turned his steps towards his own house.

At a quick pace Edmonds hurried on in silence. He noticed not, he did not seem to perceive that the trembling limbs of his daughter could hardly bear her on, and that he dragged her along with him, rather than supported her, as she hung upon his arm. But when they came to a little clump of trees behind the garden at the back of the house he suddenly stopped, and turning to Lucy, he said, "I will not tell your mother, my child, for it would make her wretched."

"Oh, father! I did not intend to do any wrong,"

replied Lucy Edmonds, with the tears streaming down her face; “ I would not have gone with him. Indeed, I would not.”

“ I know it Lucy, love,” replied her father, throwing his arms round her, and pressing her to his breast. “ I heard a good deal as I came up the walk, Lucy, and I know that though you have been a silly girl to listen to him at all, yet it was not in your heart to do any wrong—the more base he for wishing to make you. But there is one thing, Lucy,” he continued, “ you must promise me upon your word,—you must promise me never willingly to see or speak with this young man any more.”

“ Oh, father!” replied Lucy Edmonds, “ he loves me—indeed, indeed he does. And I—I”—

“ You think you love him,” answered her father; “ perhaps you really do, and if so I am very sorry for it, Lucy, for his marriage with you is not even to be thought of. I would not give you to him, my girl, if he were the richest and the highest man in the land.”

“ But perhaps you may change, father,” said Lucy—“ perhaps he may change.”

“ When he does I may, and then I will tell you,” answered Edmonds; “ but in the mean time I must have your promise,—Lucy, you would not surely disobey me?”

“Oh no, father, no,” replied Lucy Edmonds; “I will do as you bid me in all things, and I promise you that I will not see or speak with him without your knowledge and consent—but yet I am sure he loves me.”

Edmonds shook his head with a sad and painful smile. “So thinks every woman,” replied he, “of the man that ruins her. If she does not, she is worse than he is. But come, my child, keep your promise, and that promise will keep you safe. Wipe your eyes, or go and walk in the garden for a while. Your mother has had one sad fright this morning, and there is no need she should have too many at once, Lucy.”

“Oh! what has happened?” cried Lucy, drying her own tears, and looking eagerly in her father’s face.

“Why, your brother fell into the river, and would have been drowned if Mr. Morton, the gentleman who came up to the cottage the other day, had not plunged in and got him out,” replied Edmonds, and then added, in a somewhat bitter tone, “Ay, he is a gentleman, indeed; but this young fellow—”

He did not finish the sentence, but Lucy Edmonds cast down her eyes, with a cheek glowing like fire. It was her own heart accused her, and she asked herself “Have I been listening to

tales of love, without my parents' knowledge, from the lips of one whom they disapprove, while sorrow and care have come so near their dwelling?" and as she thus thought she raised her eyes to her father's face again, saying aloud,—“I will go to my mother at once. I am very sorry that I was wrong, and I will tell her, too, all that has happened, but not now, father. I will tell her to-night or to-morrow. Indeed, it will be better, for then she can always tell me what I ought to do.”

“That's a good girl,” replied her father; “act this way always, Lucy, and you will be in no danger. To-day you have been in more than you know of;” and, taking her hand, he led her on to the house.

CHAPTER XVII.

FOR at least five minutes after the park-keeper and his daughter had left him, Alfred Latimer remained standing in the grove, giving way to the vehemence of his passion, muttering vain curses, and rash and angry threats, against the man who had interfered only to save his own child. "I will have her," he said at length; "I will have her in spite of him; and I will have revenge, too—curse me, if I won't;" and stamping on the ground, and shaking his fist, he walked slowly away towards the lodge. His eyes were bent down, and, in bitter meditation, he saw little or nothing that passed around him. When he reached the gates, he opened them, and went out without noticing that two men were standing at the corner of the park wall; and, unfastening his horse, he had got his foot in the stirrup when one of the two watchers ran forward and laid his hand upon his shoulder, saying "Alfred Latimer, Esquire, I believe?"

“Yes, sir,” replied the young gentleman, turning first red and then pale. “Who the devil are you?”

“Only an officer of the sheriff of Middlesex, sir,” replied the man, “with a writ against you, backed by the sheriff of the county, for a trifle you owe to Mr. Jones, of Piccadilly. Don’t doubt but your mother will soon settle the matter.”

Alfred Latimer gazed at him with a look of hesitation for a moment, but gradually his face assumed a more determined and a fiercer aspect, and he replied “No; I will not beg of my own mother. I’d rather go to gaol.”

“Oh, sir, I’ve got nice apartments; quite at your service, sir,” replied the officer. “Airy situation, sir, looking upon the river. Do you travel by coach, sir, or would you like to have a shay?”

“I travel on horseback,” cried Alfred Latimer, springing into the saddle, and striking his horse with the spurs. The bailiff made a snatch at the rein, but missed it, and the horse dashed on, hitting him on the shoulder with its chest and knocking him back upon the road.

“Stop him! stop him!” shouted the officer to his follower; but long ere the other man came up, the young gentleman was far upon the road.

“I shall be followed,” thought the young man,

who, unaccustomed to such proceedings, saw in imagination the sheriff's officers pursuing him, like a hunted hare, with a whole troop of mounted constables to back them. "I shall be followed ! I will take to Wenlock Wood. Then let them catch me if they can." Thus thinking, he spurred forward, till passing the cottage of Blackmore, the gardener, and the mill beyond, he came to the end of the park wall on that side, and turned up a narrow sandy path, which ran over the hill between Mallington Park and some corn-fields. It soon led into a green lane, and along this he spurred at a rapid pace, till the banks opened out, and gave him egress upon a wild and desolate looking common, with a thick wood about half a mile to the right.

At the mouth of the lane, Alfred Latimer pulled up his horse for a moment and listened ; but he still thought he heard the sound of horses' feet, and, spurring on again across the common—often obliged to turn to avoid this great mass of bushes, or that rock or large clump of trees—he reached the edge of Wenlock Wood. He had soon passed the outer belt of planting, where the trees were younger but closer together, and reached a wilder part of the wood, where tall immemorial oaks, with young saplings scattered between, rose far apart from each other, some still green and

flourishing, some in various states of decay. The ground from which they sprung was rugged and uneven, in some places covered with high fern, in some rounded with masses of thick brushwood. Here appeared a deep pit, with the little shining pond in the bottom; here rose a tall rock or a high bank, bearing ashes and beeches on the top; and ever and anon a piece of green sward appeared in the midst, affording free footing for the horse. To look upon it, it seemed at first sight an inextricable maze, through which no chance traveller could find his way, but to the eyes of Alfred Latimer the whole scene was familiar, for thither had he often resorted from the days of his boyhood, exploring its recesses with dog and gun.

Cutting as straight across as the various obstacles would permit towards the highest bank which the scene displayed, he skirted it along to a spot where a number of old oaks had congregated themselves under the bank, concealing its rugged face from the view. The trees above stretched forth their branches to those below, and several clumps of a younger growth stood forward before the rest, making the mass appear one close and impenetrable thicket; for though the wood sometimes came forward in bold prominence, sometimes retreated, leaving a deep glen or glade between the two nearest points, yet

still at the bottom appeared a thick woody screen hiding the crag. To Alfred Latimer, however, the place was, as I have said, familiar, and he rode along for about a third of a mile without pause or examination.

In the end, he drew his rein just at the mouth or entrance of one of the glades I have mentioned, gazing round on every side. Then, dismounting, he took the beast's bridle on his arm, and led him down amongst the trees, apparently at the very closest and thickest part; but just at the end a little path was to be discovered on the right, so small that the entrance was not easily discernible amongst the tangled brambles and thorns, which in that place rose high up the bolls of the trees. Alfred Latimer, however, knew the precise spot, by an old holly which stood forward, as if to protect and conceal the mouth of the path; and, leading his horse round, he pulled him unwillingly into the little road. The path soon led to a more open space behind the screen of oaks; and the young gentleman proceeded between the trees and the high craggy bank till he reached the mouth of a deep cavern—whether the work of nature or of art, who can now say? Many such are to be found in various parts of England, some well known to the geologist and the wanderer in search of the picturesque; others

unrecorded by tourist and traveller, and only familiar to the midnight assassin of game, and the still more free speculator in the property of others.

Without fear or hesitation, however, Alfred Latimer led his horse in, who fancying it, apparently, a newly-invented kind of stable, followed very willingly under the rocky arch; and still holding the bridle over his arm, the young gentleman seated himself upon a large stone, saying aloud, with a laugh, "Now let them catch me if they can, the scoundrels."

He then turned his ear to listen, but no sound was heard except the whispering of the wind through the trees; and satisfied that he had deceived his pursuers, if there were any, he proposed to remain an hour or two where he was, and then, making his way to a village about three miles distant, to pursue his course towards London, where he thought he would sell his horse, and with the money thus provided, and what remained of the sum he had borrowed from Mr. Morton, embark for the continent. It was a joyous scheme to his rash mind; visions of wild adventure crowded upon him; dreams of pleasure, not very pure or high, presented themselves to his mind's eye, and there seemed but one drawback to the plan. Had Lucy Edmonds been

with him it would have been complete ; for he loved her with as much love as he was capable of. It was all corporeal indeed ; it was her beauty, her grace, that he thought of ; but still it was, in some sort, love, for out of a thousand as fair he would have chosen her as his companion. We must not pause to picture all the sensations that he felt as he sat there and thought of her. The eager desire to possess her, in spite of all considerations, and all obstacles ; the wild schemes that suggested themselves to his mind ; or the fierce and angry yearning for vengeance upon her father. For that father's feelings or duties he had no thought, no consideration. It was enough that he had stepped in to thwart and disappoint him—to snatch the promised joy from his hand. That alone was an offence not to be forgiven by his proud and vehement spirit ; but when he recollect ed the stern and bitter words the park-keeper had used, his heart felt all on fire with impotent rage, and again he clenched his hand and stamped his foot upon the ground, till his horse started back, and nearly pulled the bridle from his arm.

The young man caught it fast, however, and angrily struck the poor beast a blow in the face with his fist, exclaiming,—“ Will you, too ?”

As he did so he thought he heard a rustle in

the further part of the cavern, and turning round, he gazed into the depth with some trepidation. He knew that it was of considerable extent, for he had explored it more than once, and, what with a turn, about thirty feet from the mouth, it might run into the cliff some fifty or sixty yards. But the darkness of the interior was so profound at that time of day that he could see nothing. The next instant, however, a voice from within exclaimed,—“ You seem mightily put out, Master Latimer. What is the matter ? ”

The voice was followed by the sound of steps, but it was not till the person who had spoken had come forward, that Alfred Latimer could see anything through the darkness. He then perceived advancing towards him a short square figure, which gradually assumed the appearance of a man dressed in a sailor’s jacket and trousers, with a striped shirt, and no waistcoat. A black handkerchief was twisted lightly round the neck, and the bushy dark whiskers extending under the chin, and almost covering the throat, at first gave him the appearance of having another handkerchief bound round his jaws. His head was covered with strong curling dark hair, and his face was bronzed with exposure to sun and wind.

At first the young gentleman did not recognise the personage who seemed so familiar with his

own name; but, after a moment's consideration, he exclaimed,—“ Ah! is that you, Jack Williams? Why, it is so long since you have been here, and the place is so dark, I do not know you. You have not shown yourself since that night when we shot the pheasants in the park, and were obliged to run for it.”

“ That would not have made me run far,” answered Williams; “ but I had other matters on hand, Mister Latimer. What's in the wind now, sir, that you are hiding here? Tell me if you like—don't tell me if you don't like. Only if you want help, here's your man.”

“ Why, I have had a quarrel with my good mother, Jack,” replied Alfred Latimer. “ She keeps me shorter of money than ever; and I have determined to leave her, and seek my fortune where I can.”

“ I hope you have brought some stock in trade with you,” answered the other; “ for fortune can't be bought and sold without fortune, as I have found out long ago.”

“ No, indeed,” answered the young gentleman, who was restrained by certain doubts as to his old acquaintance's habits, from acknowledging that he had money about him. “ I have got nothing but a few shillings and my horse; but that I intend to sell as soon as I can.”

"Ah—well—you are not up to things yet, I see," replied Williams. "I would not have come out of such a house as that, if I had been you, without bringing away enough to live for a year or two, at least. But what are you hiding for?—are you afraid she will send after you?"

"Oh, no," said Latimer, who saw that the tale of his adventure with the bailiffs would confirm the representation he had made of the state of his purse. "She would not even give me enough to keep me out of prison, and just as I was at the park gates a fellow came up, and tapped me on the shoulder. But I jumped on my horse and rode over him."

"Well done! well done!" cried Williams, slapping him on the shoulder; "on my life, you will turn out a capital fellow. Just at the park gates, eh? I suppose you had been up to bid good-by to the pretty little girl there. Why the devil did you not bring her with you? A man is always the better for having a woman with him; but I suppose it was want of money, Master Alfred. If that's the case, speak out. You were kind to me once, and one good turn deserves another. So, as I've got a little prize-money here; if a ten pound note will help you, it's quite at your service, sir; and we can send a message to pretty Lucy to join you where you like."

Alfred Latimer had imagined that his pursuit of Lucy Edmonds had been concealed from all eyes till that morning, and at first he was by no means pleased to find that it was known and commented upon by others ; but as thought hurried him rapidly on, the idea suggested itself to his mind that he might make the services of such men as the one who now spoke to him of use in attaining the objects that floated before his imagination. He formed no distinct scheme, it is true, but dim and obscure fancies of carrying off the poor girl from her home came across his brain. He knew she loved him, and believed that she would easily forgive some little force, which might spare her the struggle between duty and affection. He left the plan, then, to be arranged at an after period, and replied, "No, no, Williams—you are a good fellow ;" and he grasped his hand ; "but I will not take your little money from you, I will sell my horse, which is worth fifty pounds anywhere, and I think I can get some more from a friend. But it was not want of money stopped Lucy and me. It was that—as the devil would have it—up came her father just as we were talking about it ; and he found out all, and took her away. He has made her promise, I dare say by this time, not to go."

“Such promises are soon broken,” answered Jack Williams, with a laugh.

“Ay, so they are,” said Alfred Latimer; “but I have a scheme in my head, if I can get some good fellows who don’t stand upon trifles to help me. When I have got together a little money so as to be sure that she and I will have enough to go where we like, I will tell you more of it.—But how did you know anything of this affair? I thought I had kept it very close.”

“Ay, ay,” rejoined Williams, smiling, “but I have been hereabouts for a fortnight; and there have been more eyes in Mallington Park than Edmonds thinks of. But what is your plan, sir? I am no bad hand at scheming, and you are a young one.”

“Why, I have not yet quite made up my mind,” replied Alfred Latimer; “Lucy is willing enough to go, and would have been far away with me by this time if her father had not come up; but now he will preach to her, and forbid her to see me any more, though I offered him to marry her at once.”

“Why, the man must be a fool,” exclaimed Williams in great surprise.

“Ay — but he threw in my teeth that I was fonder of bold, wild fellows,” answered the young gentleman, “than of a set of puling coxcombs,

such as one meets in society, and a great deal more of such cant. Now, I dare say Lucy will be watched and looked after, and persuaded not to come out to see me."

"Oh! we will soon manage that, sir," said Jack Williams, "if he won't let her come, why, I would go and take her. If you mean to marry her, the fool of a father should be forced to what is good for her and him too."

"Hark!" said Latimer, in a low voice. "There are steps coming near!"

"I dare say," answered the other, "it is Bill Maltby; I expect him soon, and if it be any one else, I will break his head. But you get farther back into the shade—you can take your horse into the turning."

"I know, I know," answered Alfred Latimer; and retreating towards the back of the cavern, he stopped where he judged that neither he nor his horse could be seen.

There, for the first time, a question suggested itself somewhat difficult to solve, but not very pleasant to leave in doubt. What was Jack Williams's motive for lying concealed in Wenlock Wood? He had been in former days anything but famous either for good conduct or timidity in the commission of evil. One of the most notorious poachers in the country, though the son of a re-

spectable farmer, he had filled the whole neighbourhood with his exploits, and had only escaped punishment by mingled boldness and skill. Once, indeed, he had been detected in the act and taken, after desperate resistance ; but he was at that time a mere lad, and his father's entreaties to the owner of the game had saved the son from the consequences of his offence, though only on the condition that he should be sent to sea. To sea he accordingly went, and returned, after a short time, with his moral health, at least, not at all improved by his marine excursion. All these things, and many more not very creditable to his friend, Alfred Latimer remembered ; but he had no time to carry his speculation far before the steps he had heard sounded close to the cave, and another figure darkened the mouth.

CHAPTER XVIII.

As Alfred Latimer stood in the shadow of the cave, he could see without being seen ; and he very soon perceived that the visitor was no other than his dissolute companion Bill Maltby. An unusual degree of eagerness appeared in Maltby's manner as he first met Williams, but their voices soon dropped almost to a whisper. Knowing both parties well, Latimer did not think it necessary to use much ceremony in joining them, and with the foot of his horse announcing his approach, he advanced to the spot where they were standing ; catching a few words which Williams uttered in a louder tone.

"No, no," the man said, "he is not up to that yet. He will be one day, when he learns a little better."

By this time the young gentleman was close to them ; and Williams turning round, as if he had previously forgotten his proximity, and had been

talking of some one else, proceeded, "Ah, Mr. Latimer! — You see I have got a companion, Bill. But I think he is frightened about nothing ;" and he proceeded to relate to the other the story of Alfred Latimer's adventure with the bailiffs.

"Pooh!" said Maltby; "I saw the two fellows drinking at the Bagpipes, and waiting for the coach to return to London. You can go back quite well now, if you like, Latimer, for the old Blue always passes at eleven, and it is well nigh one now."

"He is not going back at all just yet," answered Williams, speaking for his young companion; "but you can go on in safety, if you like, sir; for you hear what Bill says."

"I am sure they followed me part of the way," said Latimer; "and I saw some people riding on the common."

Bill Maltby laughed. "So did I," he said. "I saw Squire Middleton, and his two sons, and the keeper, on their ponies. But I saw the two fellows who came down last night drinking a glass of brandy and water in the coffee-room of the Bagpipes, and one of them told me they were waiting for the coach. So you can go now quite well, Mr. Latimer; there's no risk in the world."

It needed no great penetration on the part of Alfred Latimer to see that his two companions

wished to get rid of him : a very unpleasant perception it is, which is almost sure to touch upon some tender point : but vanity does not always resent the injury in the same manner. Sometimes she takes herself off in silent indignation ; sometimes she stays out of pure perverseness. In the case of Alfred Latimer she had very nearly persuaded him to remain where he was ; for the young gentleman very well understood that they were about something which they thought, to use Jack Williams's expression, "he was not up to," and his vanity was equally mortified at being found one too many, and at being judged unequal to any undertaking.

Nevertheless, several motives induced him to beat his retreat ; they were two to one, and not persons to be lightly quarrelled with : he proposed also to employ them afterwards, and it was not worth while to have any disagreement with them then ; the town, too, towards which his steps were bent was at a considerable distance, and he wished to reach London as early as possible on the following day. Deciding upon his course, then, he led his horse out of the cave, and walked on, with the bridle over his arm, between the old trees and the high cliffy bank. The man Williams accompanied him, giving Bill Maltby a sign to stay behind ; and when they

had got a sufficient distance to be out of earshot, he said, in a civil and kindly tone, " Well, Mr. Latimer, when you have settled your business, and like to go on with that little affair of pretty Lucy Edmonds, you have nothing to do but to come and let me know. I did not speak of it before Bill Maltby there, for there 's no use in telling him anything about it now; but you see, as it 's very likely that I shan't be just where I am now when you come back, you must ask Bill where I am, for he 'll know."

Thus saying he held out his hand, and without any consideration of all with which that hand might be stained, and probably the spots upon it were not few, Alfred Latimer took it, receiving the contagion of a foul mental disease, mortal to the better life of the heart.

He then rode on upon his way, and Jack Williams returned to his companion in the cave; whose first question was, " What have you done the young cove out of, Jack?"

" I 've done him out of nothing," answered the other in a grave tone; for he was one of those men who, though carried as it were by an irresistible impulse to one bad act after another, yet feel throughout the whole the gloom and sadness of crime upon them—who have not that levity of spirit which gives a temporary sunshine to some

of the wicked, but who, with a cold and stern determination, follow the way they have laid out for themselves, with the shadow of their fate always upon them. “ I have done him out of nothing, Bill,” he said ; “ first, because I did not want, and next, because he has devilish little to be done out of.”

“ Why didn’t you want ?” asked Bill Maltby ; “ he had money enough last night, and it’s no bad joke to clean out such a gull as that.”

“ He’s not such a gull as you think,” answered Williams. “ There’s a good deal of determined devil in him, I can tell you, as you’ll find out one day. Then, as to money, he said he had got very little. But if he had had the Mint in his breeches-pocket I wouldn’t have put my hand in ; first, because he’s always been civil and kind to me, and, next, because he’s one of us in some sort already, and will be more so before long.”

“ Ay, ay, so you think,” said Bill Maltby ; “ but you’ll find yourself twisted there. His mother will give him money enough when she finds he’s resolute with her, and then he’ll see us all at the devil.”

Williams looked at him with a grim smile. “ You are mistaken, Bill,” he said. “ There are some roads on which, if you take but two or three steps, you never can go back again, do what you

will, and ours is one. This lad has already got his feet upon it, and there's no going back for him.—But let us talk about this other job. When did you say the fellow would pass by?"

"Why, I told him to meet me over at Sturton at three," answered his companion, "and that I would get him a good sale for his stuff; so he'll pass here about two. Now you see, Jack, we must settle what's to be done; for I suppose you won't like to finish him exactly?"

"No," said Williams, thoughtfully; "no, not unless he shows fight. Then, when one's blood is up, no one can tell what may happen. But what of that? I don't see what difference that makes. The law says it's all the same whether you relieve a fellow of the superfluous and let him go, or cut his pipe, and stop his whistling. One's hanged for it all the same, if one's found out."

"Ay, but I'll tell you what difference it makes in this matter," said Bill Maltby. "You see, if you intended to do the thing out and out, I must stay with you, and lend a hand; but if you do not, I had better go on to Sturton, and speak to the fellows there about taking some of his stuff. Then I can meet him, and be quite civil to him."

"Ay, ay, Bill, take care of yourself," replied Jack Williams. "There—don't look cross at me—

I think you are quite right. There is no use of putting two heads into a noose, when one will do. What has he got about him?"

"A cool hundred, I should think," replied Billy Maltby. "I saw him flash a five pound note of the Huntingdon bank; so I just gave him a hint, as a friend, that he had better get them changed, for that there was a talk of that money-shop going. He answered, he had sold for a hundred at Huntingdon and Kimbolton three or four days ago, and then he had heard nothing against the bank. He thanked me, however, for my advice; and said, he would get all he had changed before he went further."

"He seems to be no fool, then," said Williams, in a thoughtful tone.

"Yes, he is—and no, he is not," answered Billy Maltby. "He seems quite a ninny in some things, and shrewd enough in others."

"A sort of man to remember the cut of one's jib well—eh?" asked Jack Williams; "and to swear to it stoutly afterwards, I dare say?"

Maltby nodded his head, and his companion mused for several minutes. His next words showed upon what his thoughts had turned; for at length he said abruptly, "No, I won't do for him! It's not come to that yet, Bill: but I'll take care he sha'n't see me. You go on to Sturton, and leave

the rest to me.—You are quite sure of the way he will come?"

"Quite; unless the devil puts his foot in it," answered Bill Maltby; "for I told him of the red post, and of the three roads, and that if he went either to the right or to the left he would lose himself. So he said he would take care; that he was fond of a country walk, but did not want to be one of the babes in the wood."

The scoundrel laughed gaily at his own conceit; some further conversation took place, and at length the younger man took his departure for the little town, humming a slang song, as carelessly as if the dark weight of crime rested not on his heart—no thought of punishment here or hereafter troubled the enjoyment of the hour.

His companion displayed a different aspect; for, going a little further into the cave, he seated himself, crossed his long sinewy arms upon his broad chest, and with his eyes bent upon the ground, and his brow gathered into a frown, remained in gloomy thought for the next half hour. What was it that troubled him? Was it remorse, or apprehension? Did conscience speak? or did he look forward to the dark result, even in this world, of the deeds in which he was engaged? Did he calculate nicely the chances of the losing

game he was playing ? Did he think how seldom any evil act remains unpunished—how rarely one foul deed does not lead to deeds still fouler—how impossible it is for any man to say “This shall be the last !” No, there might be regret, but as yet no remorse. He knew not well why, he cared not to inquire, but the sun seemed to have gone out for him, and all was grey. He remembered how, when he was a little boy, and had sported in the neighbouring fields and woods, all nature had had charms for him. The singing of the birds had been sweet music, the breath of the fresh air the finest of perfumes, a new flower or a piece of painted glass a treasure, and everything to a healthy frame and an uncorrupted mind had been full of beauty and delight. But the light had passed away, and he could no more admire or enjoy. In the fierce burst of animal passion, in the keen excitement of strife, of revelry, or of play, were to be found the feverish pleasures which formed all that was left to him. He knew not how it was or why, but he felt that it was so with regret ; for memory told him, that in the past he had left behind jewels that the present had nothing to equal, and which the future could never restore—the jewels of the heart.

He pondered not much upon such things it is true, but still that cloud hung above him, shadow-

ing all his thoughts. He turned his mind to the adventure before him ; he laid out his plan ; he determined on his conduct—not with any consecutive train of ideas, but pursuing a devious and uncertain course, his mind returned to the object in view, and then darted off to something new again. Yet over the whole was the cloud and the shadow, and all was gloomy and stern.

At length, rising quietly, he said, “It is time to be jogging, the fellow can’t be long first ;” and going into the recesses of the cave he put a brace of pistols into his pocket, a powder flask, a small bar of iron like a marlin spike, and wrapped up a pair of thick boots in a bundle with some clothes. Then taking a heavy stick formed of a sapling oak, with the rounded root at the end, he thrust it through the tie of the handkerchief, which contained his goods and chattels, laid it on his shoulder, and walked out of the cave.

With a slow step, and looking round him on every side, he advanced, forcing his way through the trees, till he reached the side of a small path, which ran from Mallington to Sturton. There was a horse-road on the other side of the wood, and a cart-road by the bank of the river, but this was one of those short cuts worn by the habitual feet which had passed from time immemorial—every day some one, but rarely more than one or

two, so that the grass had time to grow and flourish; and very often, especially in the spring time, the brambles would shoot across and strive to interrupt the way, as if to reclaim it to wild nature. There the man examined every corner of the brushwood, and every tree. It was evident that he was seeking for a hiding-place, but it was with difficulty he found one which suited his purpose. At length, he pitched upon a spot where, underneath a tall oak, had grown up some high bushes, flanking the path. Behind them was a nook, which concealed him from any one coming from Mallington, while to the right it was free from all obstacles which might have impeded the use of his arm, except a small branch shooting out from one of the hawthorns, which he cut away with his knife. He then took up his position, sitting on the ground with his head leaning easily against the trunk of the tall tree. To have seen him, any one might have supposed that there was a heart at ease, so quiet and unconcerned was the attitude into which his limbs had fallen. But was it so, indeed? Oh, no! Even when conscience is altogether silent, evil carries its own punishment about with it. The doubt—the apprehension—the agitation of thought that precedes the act—the burning excitement when it is committed—the pallid satiety of the intervals—the parched

aridity of the heart till a new crime supplies a fresh draught of the same fiery stream which but regenerates the thirst it is intended to assuage,— all, all are the slow commencement of that hell to which the wicked go down more slowly though more surely than they think. He lay and listened for the coming foot-falls, and moodily he pondered over the past and the present. Yet he thought not to forbear. Why should he forbear? he asked himself. His lot was drawn, his fate sealed, his road chosen. There was no returning. Nevertheless, when a thrush sitting on the tree above his head began to pour forth its afternoon song, there was something in the sound that seemed to touch him. It was like the voice of an angel in pity calling to him to forbear; and, whatever were his thoughts, he murmured, “I will not hit him hard.”

The bird continued to sing for a moment or two, and as if to divert his mind from its appeal, he looked around, while the fresh air breathed upon his cheek, and the light and shade of the green leaves danced before his eyes. “This is a beautiful place,” he thought; “one could lie here all day.” The very idea was a pleasant and refreshing thing, like a fountain to the wanderer in the desert; but he would not rest upon it either; and he carelessly plucked a flower that grew near,

looking into the blue petals, and gazing, though without thought of its wonders, upon the marvellous economy within. "How beautiful these wild flowers are," he said to himself again. "My poor sister Mary, that used to love them so, was like one of them—poor thing!—Pooly! I am a fool," and he cast the flower away.

Heaven only knows had he gone on, and listened to the voice which strove to make itself heard, what might have been the result. But the hour of mercy had passed by; he had turned three times from the appeal that might have saved him; and almost as the flower fell from his hand, the bird ceased its song, and took wing from the branch above. A footstep was coming near; and rising up he looked through the branches upon the path. There was a gaily-dressed man—he whom we have described as coming upon Morton and Louisa Charlton as they sat by the stream—walking slowly forward with a sauntering and self-conceited air.

Williams grasped the thick stick he had brought with him, the bundle had been cast down long before. He set his teeth, compressed his lips, and hardly breathed. His heart beat, though he would have stilled its beatings; his temples throbbed, though in moments of greater danger his bosom had been calm, his brain cool. It was not

fear, it was not doubt that was upon him—it was the troubled expectation of crime.

Two or three more steps and the wayfarer was close to him; he passed the tall tree and the low bushes, and then a thundering blow upon the head dashed down his hat upon his brow, and laid him on the ground. The bludgeon was raised again to strike him as he lay, but he was silent and motionless—so still that his very tranquillity seemed to plead for mercy.

“ I hit him harder than I intended,” said his assailant, running round the bushes, and gazing upon his victim. Then, bending down his head, he listened. “ He breathes! He is but stunned;” and quickly putting his hands into the traveller’s pockets, he drew out a heavy purse crammed well nigh full of gold; there was a pocket-book also, with some bank-notes in it, but that he threw down again, and, satisfied with his prize, gazed round him for a moment.

All was still; and he heard the chirping of the grasshopper.

Then darting back behind the bushes, he snatched up his bundle; but before he went, returned to take another look at what he had done. He bent down his head again, but now he could hear no breath; and with a quick step he hurried away up the path for a couple of hundred yards

then turned into the wood again, and, pursuing a circuitous course, came out upon the common at the back of Mallington Park, some two miles from the scene of his crime, and quite on the other side. At this time, indeed, it appeared as if he were rather going to, than coming from the spot where the deed had been committed; but there was close by a small country road leading down, under the park wall, to Mallington, and scarcely had his feet entered upon it when he beheld two labouring men walking on before him.

His first impulse was to quit it again, but a second thought made him quicken his pace and come up with them. He knew neither, but one gave him good-day as he went, and entering into conversation, he proceeded in their company till they reached the bank of the river. There the course of his two companions led them to the right, while his went to the left, for he had already told them that he was going to Mallington, and, leaving them, he walked stoutly on till they were out of sight; then seating himself on the bank, he took off his shoes and stockings and washed his feet in the river, looked round to ensure that he was not observed, and taking the thick boots out of his bundle, put a stone in each of the light sailor's pumps, and cast them into the water.

CHAPTER XIX.

WE must now return for a while, dear reader, to notice what took place in the wood where Williams had left his victim. The man lay quite still, with his head partly turned on one side, and his hat beaten down till it reached his eyebrows. The back of the hat, indeed, was quite knocked in, for there the blow had fallen. His eyes were closed, too, when his assailant walked away, and his hand remained extended, with a little memorandum-book fallen from it on the grass. But as soon as the retreating footsteps become somewhat faint, the eyelids were slightly raised, then fully lifted, and he gazed down the path which the robber had taken. Williams was still in sight, but was lost the moment after behind the trees; and the traveller lifted his head and listened. Then raising himself slowly on his arm, he sat up, and put his hand to his brow, pushing off his

hat. A stream of blood from the back of his head, where one of the knotted points of the stick had cut the skin, followed and trickled down his neck, while his eyes rolled somewhat dizzily, and he leaned his cheek upon his hand. He uttered not a word, however, for several minutes, but once or twice put his left hand up to the spot where he had received the blow. He then rose, but he soon sat down again, with a faint look ; and, after a little, crawling to the spot where his pocket-book lay, he took it up, and looked over the contents. None of the notes had been taken, and he murmured,—“Thank God, it is no worse ! He has got all the guineas, though—the villain ! —but I must get back home somehow, and have my head looked to. It’s a bad knock, but I think the skull is safe. I wish I could have got a good look at him. It was not that young fellow, Maltby, as he called himself—that’s clear enough. I wonder if I can walk now ;” and, rising once more, he kept his feet better, and looked about him.

Gradually, as he recovered from the first effects of the blow, and his ideas became more clear and collected, he began to feel a stronger desire to punish his assailant, and to think of the means of doing so. Though a fop of the lower school, and as vain as a nightingale, Mr. Tobias Gibbs was by

no means a coward ; and if Williams had met him face to face, although the latter was by far the stronger man of the two, a severe contest would certainly have taken place ere Mr. Gibbs parted with the money of his employers ; for that respectable gentleman was the country traveller for a large and wealthy wholesale perfumery house in London. Nevertheless, as he knew not by whom he had been attacked, nor how many confederates might be near, he hesitated a little as to his proceedings, and was deliberating upon the next step, when an approaching footfall, and the sound of a light air of the day whistled clear and merrily, made him turn round and look the other way. A moment after a man, whom he had seen the evening before at Mallington selling fruit, appeared through the trees, walking quietly homeward. He had an honest face, that incomparable gift of nature ; but not being of the most observant character in the world, and being engaged with the thoughts of carrots, turnips, greengages, *et cetera*, he was passing by Mr. Gibbs with no other remark than “ Good afternoon, sir ! ” not taking the slightest notice of that gentleman’s broken head, crushed hat, or fallen memorandum-book.

“ Stay a moment, my good fellow,” said the traveller, feeling himself re-assured by his aspect ; “ I wish you would help me a little, or at least let

me walk home to Mallington with you, for I have been knocked down."

"Lawk-a-mercy, sir, so you have!" cried the man, looking at his head: "Why, who the deuce did you find to quarrel with in Wenlock Wood?"

"Nobody!" replied Mr. Tobias Gibbs. "Nor did any one quarrel with me."

"They must ha' been poachers, then?" said the peasant.

Mr. Gibbs contented himself with replying, "Worse, my good friend, a great deal worse; for he has first broken my head, and then taken my purse."

"Whew!" whistled the countryman, looking around. "How many of them were there?"

"Only one that I saw," answered the traveller; and he went on to relate how he had received a blow upon the head from behind; how he had fallen, sick and half stunned, but had clearly felt his pockets rifled, and had revived enough to know that the man went into the bushes again, came back and looked at him, and then walked away.

"What sort of a fellow was he?" asked his new friend. "I know most all the people about these parts."

"I can hardly tell," answered Mr. Gibbs; "for I only got sight of him just as he was going through the trees yonder, and then only saw his

head and shoulders. He seemed a tall stout man, though."

"Well, the best thing for you, master," said the peasant, "is to take hold of my arm, and toddle back to Mallington, to have your head looked to. It's a bad knock as ever I see."

"Oh, that is nothing," answered Mr. Tobias Gibbs. "A few dressings of Grimsditch's famous vulnerary salve will set that to rights in two days. But the matter now is, to find out some traces of the man who did it. He may have dropped something, forgotten something,—for such fellows are always in a twitter, they say,—and, at all events, we shall find his foot-marks somewhere."

"That's true, upon my say so!" answered the countryman. "Ay, the fellow must have lodged in there till you came up," he continued, pointing to the bushes where Williams had concealed himself; "don't you see, he's cut a stick out of that thorn."

But, on entering the sort of den afforded by the trees, they found the branch which had been detached by the robber to give room for his arm to strike. The ground on which he had been reclining still bore the impress of his person; but no other trace was to be found. On coming out again, however, close to where the traveller had fallen, was seen a footmark in the sandy part of the path,

showing the print of a light and neatly formed shoe, without a heel, while Mr. Gibbs's boot had left another impression easily to be distinguished from the first. They looked around in vain for other marks; till, following the path a little farther, they found in the sand at the side a fresh print, turned towards the spot from whence the blow had been aimed.

"Ay, he came this way, across from those trees and the bank," said the countryman. "I should not wonder if he had been harbouring all night in Gammer Mudge's hole."

"What's that?" demanded Mr. Gibbs, in surprise.

"Why, a great hole of a place in the bank," said his companion; "a sort of cave, like, where they say one Gammer Mudge, a witch of those times, lived till she was ninety-nine year old, and then the devil came to fetch her."

"It was high time," replied the traveller.—"But there is another mark."

"Ay, and here's a horse's feet, too," said the countryman. "There has been more of them than one. Stay a bit, I'll cut two good stout sticks;" and, fixing upon some sapling oaks, he furnished himself and his companion with the only weapons that could be provided.

They then traced the steps both of a man and

horse back through the trees to the mouth of the cave, which they approached with extreme caution. The aspect of the place did not at all prepossess Mr. Gibbs with any favourable idea of its tenants; and it was some time before either he or his companion liked to venture in. At length, however, they mustered resolution sufficient to advance a few steps into the cave; but their search proved no further availing than by discovering the ashes of an extinguished fire, by the side of which were lying the bones of a fowl of some kind and a broken porter bottle.

“Ay,” said the peasant when he saw these vestiges of a feast; “they are some of those damned gipsies.”

The poor gipsies are sure, in all country neighbourhoods, to come in for their share of suspicion; and a name has hanged many a poor dog that was as innocent as ever lived. “I dare say the fellow was a gipsy,” said Mr. Gibbs, “for he had black hair, that I saw.”

“Ay, and I have been thinking,” said his companion who did not want shrewdness, “that he must have known you was a-coming, for he had been lying there in the bushes for a good while—that’s clear enough—and then, what could he cut away that branch for, unless it were to have a fair whack at your head? for you see, master, he did

nothing but cut it off out of the way, and throw it down."

"That's true! that's very true!" exclaimed the traveller, "I did not think of that."

"Did any one know as you were going along here?" asked the countryman.

"Yes, one young gentleman who called himself Maltby," replied Mr. Gibbs.

"Ay! as bad a lad as any in the place," answered the countryman; "I'll tell you about him as we go along—but, after all, it could not be he who did it himself, for I saw him an hour or more ago walking about in Sturton, and seeming as if he were looking for some one."

"I promised to meet him there at three," said the traveller. "No, it could not be he—that is clear. But I shan't go on now, however.—We've found out all we can, I think, and had better get back to Mallington. So this Maltby is a bad fellow?"

"He is a bad 'un," answered the countryman; and they turned their steps along the path homeward.

CHAPTER XX.

THERE was a snug little tea and card party at Mallington ; one of those parties which used constantly to take place amongst small communities like that of the place we speak of between twenty and thirty years ago, where the limited sphere of the society produced that fusion of ranks and classes which many people wish to see further extended. If the surgeon and the lawyer had refused to meet the shopkeeper and the farmer they would have lived almost alone ; they could not have enjoyed their rubber. If the shopkeeper and the farmer had excluded the lawyer's clerk or the surgeon's assistant they could have made up but one card-table. The necessities of the case sometimes carried the condescension further, and when the Earl of Mallington was down at the hall, the fashionable appearance of his *gentleman*, and the superior knowledge of great life displayed by that personage, as well as certain little considerations

of his influence with his lord, caused him occasionally to receive a note of invitation, which he sometimes treated with contempt, sometimes condescended to accept. Then, again, the great expense of Mallington House, and the power of Mrs. Windsor within its walls, rendered her favour worth courting; and Mr. Brown ventured to solicit the honour of her company to one of his *soirées*. The Misses Martin and several others turned up their noses at the housekeeper, and wondered that Mr. Brown could do such a thing; but it was soon found that Mr. Brown's shop gained by the proceeding, and Mr. Green and Miss White and Mrs. Yellowly, together with Messieurs and Mesdames East, West, North, and South, followed his example.

It might be a curious question whether this union of classes produced any remarkable improvement, indeed, in the Mallington society. They all met, and they all played at cards, and they all drank tea and ate cakes and bread and butter, it is true; but they all tore one another to pieces with their tongues, if not with their teeth; and, as in most other societies, the grand, though secret object of meeting seemed to be for every pair to say some ill-natured thing to each other of a third, whose back was turned. *Persiflage*—the gross vulgarity of the great and smart—was

indeed, wanting; for they had no idea of what is called mincing matters. They did not covertly laugh at their neighbours, and say cutting things with the sweetest look imaginable: no, but they abused each other to their heart's content; sometimes—nay, generally—in secret, but occasionally, when the blood was up, and the tricks and honours were against them, with all the open licence of the card table; for many an odd trick turns up there, reader, besides that which is formed of four pieces of painted paste-board.

It is true that their abuse was not always confined to each other, but was occasionally scattered about with a liberal hand upon their superiors in station or wealth. Thus, when the name of Mrs. Charlton was mentioned, though she was always called a dear sweet creature, quite a lady, and a great number of many other pleasant names in the presence and within the cognizance of Mrs. Windsor, one whispered to another that she was going on at a fine rate; that she would soon get through all she had, and more, too; that she was dreadfully in debt, and that she would not easily get another old gentleman to marry her and pay her bills for her. During the life of the Earl of Mallington, he had come in for his share; but it was in a different way, for his position and his habits removed him so far from the good people

of the town that they regarded him with a kind of awe. People will finger very awful things, however, and the great idol of Juggernaut itself would not escape scratching if its worshippers could get at it.

The person of all the neighbourhood, however, who was most curiously treated by the small tongues of the place was Dr. Western. During the first two years of his incumbency, he had been railed at in the bitterest manner ; he was a purse-proud haughty priest, a pharisee, a wolf in sheep's clothing, everything that is bad ; but a strange change had gradually crept over the opinions of the place, and nobody now said a word against Dr. Western, for in spite of human nature, and the assistance given to it by the devil in resisting all good influences, real excellence and the true practice of Christian virtues will have their effect. Dr. Western knew his flock well, was quite aware of their faults and their failings, laughed at their follies when they were small, reproved and grieved for them when they were great, but was never harsh in his condemnation, or bitter in his satire. He was always ready to aid, to direct, to reclaim, to give hope and consolation, to receive repentance and to encourage a return to right ; he was always performing himself that which he preached to others,

and his private fortune, as well as his position as a magistrate, gave him the opportunity of doing much good, as well as correcting much evil.

To return from this long digression, however, there was a snug little tea and card party at Mallington, and the conversation of the worthies assembled had received a zest and a fillip from various events which had taken place that morning. What a happy and fortunate thing it is for certain classes of society that there are vices and wickedness, accidents, misfortunes, and sorrows, in this good world that we inhabit! What would Mr. Tomkins, and Miss Jenkins, and Mrs. Watkins, and a great number of other people do, if it were not for that column in the newspapers which used in former days to be headed “Accidents and Offences?” They would be obliged to remain absolutely silent for one half of their lives; their very thoughts, too, would be still; they would have nothing to talk about or think about; they would lose the two greatest enjoyments of human life—commiseration and horror; they could never shudder at the thought of the man who had had his throat cut on the common, and then go comfortably to bed, after seeing that the door was bolted; they could never blush at Mrs. B—— having ran away

with Mr. A——, and stroke their chin in the consciousness of not having eloped with anybody. So it is, however, that about a third of the world—I am very moderate in my calculations—pasture their vanity and their selfishness in the wide field of other men's turpitude and misfortune. What a day, then, had it been for Mallington which presented them with the three startling and exciting occurrences of Miss Charlton having fallen into the river, and been drawn out by Mr. Morton; of Alfred Latinier having been tapped on the shoulder by a bailiff, having knocked him down, and galloped away; and more than all, of an assault and highway robbery having been committed in Wenlock Wood, with the deposition of the injured man, and the examination of witnesses before Dr. Western. If they had imported a pipe of port, and drank it all that night, they could not have been more excited or more gratified.

“Were you present, Mr. Wheeler?” asked Miss Mathilda Martin, to a thin man opposite to her, who officiated as clerk of the parish. “La, how I should liked to have been there.”

“Yes, ma'am, it was a very interesting scene,” said Mr. Wheeler, in a solemn nasal tone. “A very interesting scene, indeed! Why, we hav'nt had a murder or a highway robbery in this

neighbourhood for more than thirty years. The last was when the pedlar was murdered."

"Oh, nobody cares about that now," said Miss Martin; "but do tell us all about this business Wheeler. Was the man much hurt?"

"I can tell you more than he can, Miss Martin," said Mr. Nethersole, the surgeon, turning round from the other table, "for I dressed the gentleman's head. It was a bad contused wound on the back part of the cranium, with an aperture in length about an inch, through which the skull was discernible. There was no fracture, however, nor any depression of the bone, and though some concussion of the cerebellum"—

"Why, bless my heart, Mr. Nethersole!" said Mrs. Gibbins, who was his partner at cards. "Why, I declare you have trumped my ace—I wish you would mind what you are about. I declare you never play up to one, whatever one leads."

"My dear madam, I am very sorry," said the surgeon. "I thought"—

"But who was examined, Mr. Wheeler," said Miss Mathilda.

"Oh! a good many people, ma'am," replied the clerk. "First, the deponent deposed that having made an appointment with young Maltby, to meet at Sturton"—

"Ay, then it was young Maltby that did it," said Miss Martin,—"that's clear enough. Don't we all know young Maltby?"

"No, he couldn't have done it," said Mr. Wheeler; "for it was proved by Garbet, that Maltby was in Sturton at the time waiting for this very Mr. Gibbs. The man who was most suspected was Jack Williams. I dare say you recollect Jack Williams, Miss Martin?"

"To be sure I do," replied the lady. "The nasty vermin owed me four and ninepence for neck-handkerchiefs when he went away."

"Well, he has come back again sure enough now," answered Mr. Wheeler; "for I saw him, with my own eyes, brought up before Dr. Western upon suspicion, because he had just come into the town, and changed a five pound note."

"Well, but they let him off, I heard say," exclaimed an old lady, with a voice even shriller than Miss Martin's. "I do think that was very foolish of the doctor, anyhow. He might have commanded him for further examination, as they say in the newspaper; and that would have kept him out of harm's way."

"The doctor knows what he's about, Mrs. Green," said Mr. Wheeler, with additional solemnity, for the clerk always looked upon himself as part and parcel of the parson; and, in calling the

rector foolish, he felt that Mrs. Green assailed his own wisdom. “Don’t you suppose, madam,” he continued, “that you can tell Dr. Western what he ought to do. Why, what did he do? He set Jack Williams up, and made Mr. Gibbs look at him. Now, Mr. Gibbs is a very respectable man, Mrs. Green. So, after he had looked at Jack before and behind, he said he’d rather not swear, though the back of the head was somewhat like. But the doctor didn’t give it up for all that; for he made Garbet describe all the foot-marks they had found close by where it was done, and he swore that it was the print of a neat-made shoe, without a heel. Then Jack Williams had on a pair of thick boots, with nails all round; and two men, who had walked with him part of the road, came forward and swore, that he had overtaken them coming quite a different way. So what could the doctor do?”

“I’d have committed him for misprision,” said Miss Martin. “Didn’t he get out of the jail at Sturton? There’s always a way of catching these fellows if one has a mind; but the doctor’s getting old, and is too kind to them by half.”

This observation would have drawn an angry reply upon her head; but Mrs. Green at that moment judiciously remarked, “Three by cards, and two by honours, Mr. Wheeler;” and this

being a matter of much greater importance, the clerk asked to see the last trick.

The conversation was then directed to another branch of “the adventures of a day,” by Miss Mathilda Martin observing, “Well, it is funny, that Miss Louisa should have fallen into the water the very same day.”

Now, though it is very probable that not a single person in the room could have pointed out the funny connection which Miss Martin, junior, perceived between the accident which had occurred to Miss Charlton and the robbery in Wenlock Wood, yet they all followed the cry, and every one had their observation upon the wonderful fact of Mr. Morton having been the person to help the young lady out of the water.

“Ay, I see what will come of it clear enough,” said Miss Mathilda, with a titter.

“It’s a great shame if it does,” rejoined her elder sister. “Here’s a fellow who comes down, without any one knowing him, and puts up at such an inn as the Bagpipes, and spends no money in the place. I’m sure he’s never changed half-a-crown with us. It would not surprise me at all if he were of the same gang with you know who. They always have some smart-looking person amongst them. I’m sure what Mrs. Charlton’s about I can’t think.”

"She's minding her own affairs, Miss Martin," said Mrs. Windsor, over her shoulder, with a significant smile.

"Well, I hope she is," answered Miss Martin, tossing her head; "but every one doesn't think she's minding them very well: and I hope, if so be as such is the case, nobody will be hurt by it but herself, ma'am."

"You won't, Miss Martin," said Mrs. Windsor, sharply; and, exasperated by this little altercation, they fell upon the cards, and played away most bitterly.

However, when the game was over, Mr. Brown, the proprietor of the new shop which Mrs. Charlton had aided to establish, drew Mrs. Windsor aside, and held a whispering conference with her for two or three minutes. No one heard the whole of what was said; but Mathilda Martin, who sidled up as near to them as she could, and leaned sentimentally over the back of her chair, caught a few words to the following effect: "Well, I should take it as a great favour, Mrs. Windsor, if it were only a part. It's upwards of five hundred pounds now."

"Well, I'll do my best," replied Mrs. Windsor. "But it's of no use, I can tell you, until quarter-day:" and then, perceiving the near approximation to Miss Mathilda's ear, she walked away.

CHAPTER XXI.

UP two pair of stairs, in a small house upon the Kentish side of the river Thames, to which dwelling you entered by a door between an old iron-shop and a rag-warehouse, there was a front room, with bars over the windows. The passage by which the foot of the stairs was reached was long and narrow ; and, besides the outer door, was an inner sort of wicket, which was kept always locked. A step or two further in than the wicket was the door of a small room on the left hand side, usually containing a turn up bedstead—an old man, shaved once a fortnight—a young woman, washed not much oftener—and three small children, who generally went without ablution. All the accessories were sallow, the passage was of no colour but that of dirt, and the fragments of a piece of oilcloth which had once carpeted it only served to make the visitor stumble. The staircase was very narrow, like the passage, and there

was a coating of some thick black matter upon the rail of the banisters which had probably been left there by the pressure of many miserable hands.

The room I have mentioned was of a tolerable size, and it had the rags of a carpet over the floor. There were also five chairs, each in a crippled state, more or less, with shattered backs and arms, but sound enough in the legs, and a large old square sofa, covered with chintz, unwashed since the flood, and wanting one castor.

The chamber at the time I speak of was only tenanted by two persons ; the one occupying a chair, with his arm leaning upon the mahogany, and his whole figure cast back in a sort of reckless daring attitude, as if he felt himself perfectly at ease where he was. The expression of the other's features was very different ; it was anxious, thoughtful, annoyed, and yet displaying an effort to cast off the load of care. He leaned back on the sofa, with his head somewhat bent forward, his brow slightly contracted, and his eyes looking at the face of his companion from under the drooping lids with a steady and thoughtful glance. The whole of the upper part of the face was firm and determined ; but about the lips there was a weaker expression, not exactly timid, but hesitating and uncertain ; and yet, if one considered his

countenance with the eye of a Lavater, the strongly marked jawbone and prominent chin spoke daring courage.

The other was short—very short—but remarkably broad set; his chest was deep and wide, his arms long, and his flanks thin; his brow was high and wide, but the back of the head, though somewhat concealed by a quantity of thin light hair, that floated in graceful waves all over it, was as round as a ball, somewhat protuberant above and behind the ears, and large where the base was joined by the thick neck. His features were square cut, the eye soft and somewhat sleepy, the upper lip short and beautifully chiseled, but the lower too full. The complexion was pale, as if with that sort of sickness which proceeds from intemperance of some kind, blanching the cheek and hollowing the eye without diminishing the corporeal powers, at least in its earliest stages.

The hue of health was upon the cheek of the other, and there was also a great difference in the expression of their two faces. His who sat upon the sofa seemed to speak a quick, impatient, haughty disposition, somewhat tamed for the time by misfortune or disappointment. It was easily read in all its aspects—except, perhaps, when a darker shade came over it; a look of almost demoniacal fierceness, which gave one the im-

pression of blacker things being within than at first we were willing to imagine.

The expression of the other's countenance was of reckless, heedless carelessness. There seemed no struggle between good and evil ; no hesitation, regret, or care. It was full of perfect self abandonment, and yet there was every now and then a look of keen cunning and sarcastic scorn poured out of the pale blue eyes, like a ray of light finding its way into a dark room from some unknown source.

Between the two stood a bowl of strong brandy punch, to which each helped himself from time to time, without filling the glass full, or drinking it off hastily ; but sipping the contents quietly and leisurely, while they conversed. It was evident that they had not met to drink, but drank merely because they had met.

The one tenant of the spunging-house—he who sat upon the sofa—the reader need hardly be told was Alfred Latimer ; and the other, who sat near him, was a prisoner whom he had found there when the clear-sighted officials of the sheriff pounced upon him and bore him off, and to whose conversation he had been indebted for several cheerful hours, which might otherwise have been passed drearily enough. But he was indebted to him for nothing else ; for, sad to say, the conversa-

tion of the debtor's prison, call it by what name you will—Fleet, King's Bench, Whitecross-street, or spunging-house—is full of nought but contamination and evil. Dark and sad—dark and sad is that companionship found there; and during the ten days that Alfred Latimer had spent within those walls, one after another, as they had come and gone, the passing tenants of the prison had each taught him some lesson of fraud—had each habituated his thoughts to the contemplation of some new vice. But the man who was now beside him had been his constant monitor, had first made him acquainted with the ways of the place, and had afterwards informed him of a thousand horrible antecedents, which are constantly befalling the men who end in the prison at last. He himself was an epitome of all the faults, follies, and vices—nay, I would say crimes—which can be committed in society without actual punishment; and he had arrived at that state where evil “becomes man's good,” and he boasts of the wickedness he has done. The younger brother of a man of station and wealth, he had set out in life in an honourable profession, with powerful friends, and sufficient fortune, but the latter had been soon spent, and the former soon alienated. One vice followed another, and with a combination of headstrong violence and shrewd cunning, he had

avenged himself upon the connexions who had abandoned him, both by using their names to procure the means of his own gratification, and by rendering their relationship with him a disgrace to themselves. Through many a long afternoon he had amused his young companion with tales of what he had done in former years ; of the duels he had fought, and the honest men he had slain to shield himself from the consequences of other deeds ; ay, and of the tricks and devices he had used to make the shot take effect, and to anticipate the fire of his adversary. It was all true, too true, and yet he boasted of it ! Then he spoke of those whom he had swindled, and of all the cunning arts he had used to cheat and rob without calling on his head the arm of the law ; and many a wild adventure and narrow escape was told between, which, seasoned with wit and eloquence, for he possessed both, and gilt with jest and sophistry, for he spared neither, were full of interest to his hearer.

The effect upon the mind of Alfred Latimer was what might be expected. It was not to incline him to follow exactly the same course ; for the difference between the two characters marked out a separate path for each ; but it was to sweep away every vestige of principle. He went into that foul place, reckless, vehement, full of fiery

passions and dangerous weaknesses, but with some hesitations and some doubts. In ten days his doubts and hesitations were gone; virtue was his scorn, honour was a name, and pleasure of one kind or another was the only good.

He had been telling his companion his circumstances and situation; and, oh! how merrily the other laughed to hear that he had suffered himself to be refused money by a wealthy mother.

“Why, what would you have done?” demanded Alfred Latimer, somewhat ashamed of his ignorance in the eyes of his companion.

“Done!” exclaimed Captain Tankerville. “There were twenty things to be done. Just write a cheque in her name for the money she ought to have given you; or, if you did not like that, supply yourself from the plate chest. We should always make our relations do what they ought to do—it is a duty we owe them. Or, if you did not like to do that, why not come up to town, and order three or four thousand pounds’ worth of things in her name—have them sent home to your lodging, and transfer them to a fence or a pawnbroker? I could tell you a dozen ways of making fathers and mothers, and brothers and uncles perform the duties of relationship;” and again he laughed merrily.

While it was still ringing upon his lip the door opened, and the master of the house put in his head, saying,—“Mr. Latimer, here is a gentleman wishes to see you;” and, looking towards the door, the young man beheld Mr. Morton coming forward from the top of the stairs.

CHAPTER XXII.

MORTON looked round with an expression of countenance not altogether easy to describe. There was pain in it and surprise; but as his eyes rather wandered round the miserable room he was entering, than turned with any feeling of commiseration towards its tenants it was easy to perceive that his feelings were more general than particular; and, in truth, he was at that moment asking himself—"Does the law of England really and truly consign unhappy wretches who have contracted debts, which—often by the result of accident or misfortune—they cannot pay, to such an abode as this, to be preyed upon by a set of harpies who wring from them all that they have left? The old punishment—if ever there was such a one—of throwing a man into a pit full of serpents was better than this."

Whatever were his reflections, Alfred Latimer started up to receive him with a very different air and manner from those which he usually bore.

Both vice and virtue have their self-confidence ; each man, if he be not of a very weak and nervous temperament, acquires a particular sort of courage, in whatever path he chooses to pursue, by the time he has reached a certain point ; and the young prisoner had by this time become sufficiently familiarized with his situation to feel not in the least ashamed of it. The most dexterous of pickpockets is self ; but he follows a very different course from other gentlemen of his profession, and under his guidance we take our faults and follies out of our own pocket without at all perceiving the theft, and put them into other people's ; and by this pleasant assistance Alfred Latimer had already laid upon his mother's shoulders the whole blame of his having found his way into a spunging-house — nay, more, of all the consequences that were to flow thence to himself and others. He knew not, he had no notion what he might hereafter do in the way of wickedness ; but it was already predetermined in his own mind, that whatever it was, it would be Mrs. Charlton's fault, from having exposed him to the contamination of such society.

“ Why the devil did she not pay the money ? ” he asked himself ; “ and then she would have saved me all this.”

“ Ah, Morton,” he said, “ this is very kind of

you, to come to see me; for I suppose you are not grabbed yourself; and so that must be your motive."

"That alone," replied the young gentleman. "I wish to have a few minutes conversation with you, however, when you are at leisure."

"Oh! by-and-by will do," said Mr. Latimer; "come sit down, and take some punch."

"No, I thank you," answered Morton; "I never drink punch. But, by your good leave, I should be glad to speak with you soon, as my time is very short."

"Well, you can speak now," replied Alfred Latimer. "This is only my friend, Captain Tankerville.—Captain Tankerville, my friend, Mr. Morton."

Captain Tankerville rose and bowed with a cold air; for it is wonderful how soon men, much accustomed to the world, contrive to separate the classes of mankind one from the other,—the wheat from the chaff,—and appropriate to themselves that which may serve their purposes, and none other. In an instant Captain Tankerville perceived that Morton was a man neither to be gulled nor to be led—neither to be his dupe nor his companion. It was not worth while either to be civil or to be rude, however; and, after having received a slight inclination of the head in return for his

bow, Alfred's fellow-captive sat down again, resolved not to quit the field without necessity.

Morton cut the matter very short, saying, "What I have to communicate, Latimer, must be in private; for it refers not only to your own affairs, which you might not care about entering upon before this gentleman, but to those of others, who might not judge such a course expedient. Can we not go into another room?"

"Oh dear, no!" said Captain Tankerville, rising at this strong hint. "If I am in the way I will beat my retreat. Good-evening for the present, Latimer;" and he walked towards the door. The young gentleman accompanied him so far, saying something about his conference not being long, and then returned to Morton.

"Well, what news from Mallington, Morton?" asked he, ladling himself out a little of the punch that remained. "I suppose my good mother has heard of this affair, though I did not tell her. I'd have died upon prison-allowance rather than have written one word to her."

"There you are very wrong," replied Morton, in a grave tone. "Whatever may be Mrs. Charlton's faults, want of affection for you is not amongst them; and it is at her request that I came to town last night."

"But has she sent the money?" demanded her

excellent son. "What the devil is the use of sending you, unless she has sent the money?"

"That she could not do," replied Morton, feeling his cheek begin to get a little warm at the perfect heartlessness which the youth displayed. "Mrs. Charlton, in her tenderness for you, and in the distress of mind which your situation occasioned, was induced to lay before me the state of her affairs in a manner which has proved to me, and would prove to you, the utter impossibility of her paying your debts. She has not the money ! She has only her jointure, and—nay, do not interrupt me till I have done—and that I am sorry to say has been encumbered very considerably in consequence of her having kept up since Mr. Charlton's death the same establishment which existed during his life. Your debts, it seems, amount to nearly a thousand pounds, and it would require the sacrifice of several years' income for her to pay those and her own also."

Alfred Latimer leaned his head upon his hand, evidently not liking at all the idea of being left a prisoner for years. All his dreams of pleasure and adventure when he should have regained his liberty were put to flight ; and after having remained for some moments in silence, he said, "Well, then, I suppose I must go into the Bench and get the rules."

Morton purposely made no reply ; and the next instant his young companion looked up laughing, as if a new thought had struck him, exclaiming, "Morton, I have a better plan than that. You get your marriage over with Louisa as soon as possible, and then lend me the money out of her fortune."

"My marriage with Miss Charlton!" said Morton, gravely, and in a tone of surprise, for he had entertained no idea that Alfred Latimer had so completely settled the matter for him in his own mind. "My dear sir, you are speaking of a matter as determined- which is very far from being so. Doubtless Miss Charlton is worthy of the affection of persons much higher in station and fortune than myself; but"—

"Pooh — pooh, nonsense, Morton," replied Alfred Latimer. "Do you suppose I have not got my eyes? You are in love with Louisa, and Louisa with you, and my mother has made up her mind that you shall marry her ; but," he added, after thinking for a moment, "I should not wonder if she made you pay for it. You know Louisa when she is of age can marry any one she likes, with my mother's consent: but if that consent be not given, and she does marry, the whole property goes to my respectable parent, and I don't know her if she does not make whoever does gain her consent come down pretty roundly."

This was a ray of light to Edmond Morton, which served to illuminate at once every dark point in Mrs. Charlton's conduct towards him. Art seldom veils itself so completely as to pass altogether undetected, unless the passions or foibles of those on whom it is practised lend it very vigorous aid. Such had not been the case with Morton, for though no man is without some touch of vanity, his was not of that degree or kind which could make him believe that Mrs. Charlton had been so completely fascinated with his good mien or high qualities as to make him her own frequent guest, and her step-daughter's constant companion, without some secret motive. Nevertheless, to set up her husband's child for sale to the best bidder, was something almost too gross and shameless to be believed.

“Come, come Morton,” said his companion, after indulging him in a reverie for a few minutes, “whatever you may have expected with Louisa, it would be well worth your while to give my mother a good sum—ay, even as much as half her fortune—and the old lady cannot well ask more, I should think. You would then get four thousand a year at least, and a very beautiful girl into the bargain—ay, and the best girl in all the world too.”

Morton listened to him to the end, and then replied, “I think, Latimer, you mistake your

mother's views, and I am quite sure that you mistake me altogether. You will find that, whatever may be my feelings, I am not one to make a matter of merchandise of Miss Charlton's hand ; that you may depend upon. But to return to other matters. There is an easier, a more honourable way of relieving you from the difficulties that press upon you, and of delivering you speedily from this place. I informed your mother that I thought I could arrange the matter, and during this morning I have ascertained the fact."

"Ay!" said his companion ; "how is that?"

"The money can be borrowed," replied Morton, "on the property which is settled upon you. My solicitor has a client who will advance it."

"Ay, at ten per cent., I suppose," said the youth ; "and eat up the whole income with interest."

"No, not so," answered Morton, "at four per cent. I would not meddle with any usurous transaction, and I have told him to have ready twelve hundred pounds, in case you like to take advantage of the proposal. Then, with all debts paid, you will have somewhat more than two hundred pounds to go on upon, and I trust that with the somewhat severe warning you have received, you will see the necessity of limiting your expenses by your income."

"Whatever I do, you are a capital fellow,

Morton," replied Alfred Latimer, "and have set the matter right for me a devil of a deal better than Tankerville would have done. He would have had me set these creditors at defiance, take the rules, and live jollily upon what I have got."

"Perhaps he might wish to help you to spend it," observed Morton.

"Take care what you say of him," exclaimed Alfred Latimer, laughing; "he is a fire-eating fellow, and has shot several men upon lighter words than those."

"So I have heard," answered Morton, calmly; "but I am not very much afraid of such things, and gentlemen before they fight always take care that the persons whom they so honour are those who are justified in requiring it." His tone and look were perfectly composed, but proud—almost haughty; and Alfred Latimer was a good deal struck with an air which he had never before seen his companion assume. "Were it not so," continued Morton, "every blackleg and sharper would carry all questions at the pistol's muzzle. But what do you say to my suggestion? Does it meet your views?"

"Oh, of course it does," replied Latimer, "and the sooner I am out of this cursed place the better. I declare the room stinks of broken mahogany."

"Rum-punch and cigars," added Morton, with a faint smile. "However, you cannot quit it to-night. To-morrow we must get you bail; and then I will leave you to settle the rest with my solicitor, for I have business that calls me back to Mallington."

"What, have you not done sketching?" said Alfred Latimer, with a gay laugh; "but I shall join you there as soon as all is arranged, for I have some sketches to take, too, of objects as pretty, to my eyes at least."

Morton was silent, for the words of Alfred Latimer might have several senses; but he could hardly venture to take them in one honourable to the speaker. "God grant," he said at length, somewhat abruptly, "that some honourable attachment may bring and fix you there. It would be the very best thing for you. However, I will direct my solicitor to find you bail, and will be with you about twelve to take you to his office. So good-day to you, Latimer."

They shook hands, and Morton departed, leaving Alfred Latimer in a deep fit of thought. What was his mind revolving so earnestly? Did he feel grateful for the kindness he received? Was he touched by the interest taken in his fate? Was he busy with good resolutions for the future? Alas! no. His first question to himself

was,—“ Who the devil can this fellow be? He speaks as if he were the Prince of Wales. A poor painter!—pooh! I should not wonder if he were the son of some rich East Indian, who has smothered a Begum, and brought over her money chests. It is a capital country that India. One can do very nearly what one likes there, and knock about the black fellows at pleasure. I should like to set up Sultan somewhere, and have a seraglio;” and laughing at his own thoughts, he went down to the room below, and called up Tankerville to spend the rest of the night.

CHAPTER XXIII.

IN a street not far from the inns of court, though not exactly within their solemn precincts —a little more airy and cheerful than those dark recesses of the law, but still smelling strong of red tape and blue bags—are numerous houses inhabited by solicitors, whose doors, like those of a place to which in some respects they bear a considerable resemblance (inasmuch as those who once get into them have a difficulty in getting out again, and are pretty well tormented while they are in) stand ever open to receive the poor sinners whom fate or folly lead to enter. One of the best and cleanest houses in this street, was number forty-three, but yet the passage by which one entered would have puzzled OEdipus if the Sphynx had asked when it was washed; and in the midst, just beyond a large door-mat, which appeared to have been placed there to prevent people from carrying any of the dirt away with

them, there was—nay, there is, for it is impossible 'it can have been removed—a large black stain of ink which must have been spilt nearly at the same time as the blood of David Rizzio on the floor of sad Holyrood, that storehouse of tragedies. At about ten o'clock on the morning succeeding the day of Morton's visit to Alfred Latimer, a gentleman mounted on a handsome bay horse, stopped at the door of number forty-three, and instantly a groom rode up to take his rein.

Dismounting slowly, he entered the passage, and walked on to a room at the end; and opening the said door he found himself in the presence of eight or nine clerks, shut up in boxes or pens. He was not the least abashed, however, and when the head common-law clerk advanced from the stall, with a sweet smile, the gentleman only inquired whether Mr. Quatterly had yet arrived?

The clerk assured him that Mr. Quatterly had been there for an hour; and, without more ado, Mr. Morton, for he it was, walked up the stairs, and opened a door on the first floor to the left. Within was another door covered with green baize, impervious to wind and sound, and it also opened under the young gentleman's hand, disclosing a comfortable room within, ornamented

with a large table, covered over with innumerable packets of papers, all tied up and labelled ; a large book-case, filled with books, in brown calf, all looking so like each other that they might have been taken for one family ; and an elderly gentleman, besides sundry chairs and a lamp, the flame of which, like that on Vesta's altar, was kept ever burning by certain virgins, who lived in the penetralia of the temple. The elderly gentleman at the table, Mr. Quatterly, or, as his letters generally bore his style and title, Timothy Quatterly, Esquire, had passed his meridian by several years, being now fifty-eight, if not fifty-nine. To see him sitting one would have said he was six foot high ; to see him standing one soon perceived that he was not more than five foot seven. The upper part was large, round, and bulky ; the lower part minute enough to make an almost ludicrous contrast with the rest. Nature, in fact, having been called in a hurry from South America, had brought the superstructure of an unfinished Patagonian with her, and lighting down in Lapland had clapped it on to the legs of a dwarf. This disproportion, as we shall soon have to show, affected both mind and body ; but first, let us look at his face, reader. See how round, and smooth, and almost soft it seems, with its rosy cheeks, and its little

nose. Gibbon himself, notwithstanding Madame da Deffand's terrible mistake, had never such a pair of cheeks as that; and then those merry little twinkling black eyes, with something both of high manly sagacity in them and of childlike fun, how they peep out from under the thin eyebrows. You see he is as bald, too, as a haddock, except just over the ears, and in the fat back of his neck, where the gray hair flows away in a pigtail. He is a stout man, too—rather too stout, inclined to be a little corpulent, yet active. Then his clothing is somewhat peculiar: a black coat powdered on the collar, a neckerchief as white as snow, a white waistcoat without a speck, though somewhat yellowish from London washing; but those drab knee-breeches, and those grey worsted stockings!—surely that is not in keeping, Mr. Quatterly. But perhaps he may consider his legs unworthy of their trunk, and treat them accordingly; or is it that from their littleness he regards them more tenderly, and wraps them in all that is warmest. That is probably the right solution of the enigma; and I declare the man has got a pair of silver buckles in his small shoes.

Such was, such is Timothy Quatterly, Esq., in outward appearance, and in mind there are peculiarities also. That large head contains a vast

quantity of law, and a good deal of mirth—gay, simple, almost infantine fun. There is shrewd good sense, too, within. He is not a man to be taken in—to be cheated, bamboozled, done; and yet he is as good-humoured a creature as any upon earth, ay, and benevolent too, notwithstanding his being a lawyer. In fact, he is a *lusus naturæ*: for what with erudition, law, merriment, good-nature, kindness of heart, keenness of mind, activity, shoulders, and legs, there is quite enough of him to make two men, and very tolerable men too.

But he was somewhat wayward in his whims; and though he could occasionally show that he was possessed of wit that would have shamed many a practised compounder of smart sayings, yet he was fond of a pun—barbarously fond of a pun; and, let it be remarked, that we use the word *barbarously* discreetly, and with due reverence; for though no barbarians that have ever yet been heard of were known to love that peculiar sort of tea-and-toast witticism, called a pun, being always very sedate and serious people, and much more reasonable than civilised nations, yet they have a spice of cruelty in them, and so had Mr. Quatterly; for no sooner did he discover that any pompous and magniloquent man, who fancied his grave sayings were worthy of profound attention, hated a pun, especially uttered by another man, than he

set upon him, and, with an overpowering torrent of the abhorred jest, overwhelmed his stories, broke through his arguments, swamped his conclusions, and turned all his eloquence to farce ;— there was no resisting him, for resistance only increased his cruelty and his fluency. With other persons he was more moderate ; and in conversation with any one who did not rouse the spirit of perversity within him, but smiled at even a stale jest or far-fetched illustration, he would be tender-hearted, and content himself with shadowing forth his meaning, when he did not choose to speak it plainly, with many a nursery rhyme, or school-boy joke, always brought in quaintly, and sometimes in its very simplicity judiciously. Thus, there seemed two parts in his mind as well as in his body ; one full of power, activity, and vigour—erudite, keen, perspicuous, and resolute ; the other playful, gay, malicious, and full of fun, but, like his little legs, carrying all the rest lightly over various slippery and uneven paths.

Such was the gentleman in whose presence Mr. Morton now appeared ; and, when the latter entered the room, Mr. Quatterly was looking steadily at the shagreen case of a pair of spectacles which lay upon the table before him.

“ Ah ! good morning, sir ; good morning,” he said, as soon as he beheld Morton, at the same

time rising and putting a chair for him, though, as he moved about with a light step, he seemed so top-heavy that it was hardly possible not to think every moment he would toddle over. “ Be seated, my dear sir, be seated. What news from his Majesty’s country seat in Surrey? You saw your lost mutton, I suppose, last night. Pray, did you find him shorn to your hand, as, according to all rules—and those of the King’s Bench especially—he ought to be, though the fleece of those who get in there one would think were hardly worth plucking.”

“ There are always persons quite ready, my dear sir,” replied Morton, with a smile, “ to gather up the gleanings which more legitimate husbandmen have let fall.”

“ A cut at the lawyers!” cried Mr. Quatterly, “ that’s unkind; that’s unfair. ‘ *Nemo repente fuit turpissimus.*’ It takes five years to make an attorney, hey? I know what you mean. But, pray do not call us all husbandmen. I have nothing of the husband in me, though I think I know some one who has;—ha! ha! ha!—ha! ha! ha!—ha! ha! ha!”

There was a merriment, a joviality in his laugh that was not to be resisted; and Morton joined in somewhat more quietly, adding, as soon as the cachinnation of the lawyer would allow of his

being heard—"But, my good friend, have you got the deed prepared as far as possible? for I would fain have it settled at once."

"Settled!" said the solicitor; "he is thinking of the settlements already. How these young men's wits do get inflamed with matrimony as soon as the spark is blown into a blaze—that's not a pun, mind you—it's a fine light of imagination beautifully expressed; for though you may be a spark, and a gay spark too, yet you have not shown yourself easily fanned into the necessary state of combustion."

"But an answer—an answer, my dear sir," said Morton. "Is this deed ready, as far as may be? for I wish to carry the young man out of the temptations of London as soon as may be."

"Pooh! leave him alone, and he'll come home, and most likely bring a fat tail behind him," answered the lawyer, having recourse to one of his favourite illustrations. "The temptations of London! Did ever one hear a sane man talk of such things? I never found any temptation in London. All mine have been in the country. By the way, I hope you have thought of me this year. I must have a pop at the birds, and you, or your late father, have always provided me."

"Oh, yes!" replied Morton, "you shall have

enough. Come down to me at Mallington, and I will give you enough to do."

"To draw the settlement, hey?" cried Mr. Quatterly, with a new burst of laughter; "but from what I hear, you have already bagged the best of the game there before the season, you poacher. But I'll come, and if I leave you a single cock pheasant my name's not Quatterly. Can draw the settlements after dinner, fall asleep over them, send them up to Bell, get an opinion that nobody on earth can read, and leave a whole generation of law-suits for the benefit of my clerks and their children. Must take care of the poor boys in the office, you know. But come, I see you are impatient. Now to business. What does the young fellow say? That is the first question. I have known young dogs so fond of that kennel, that nothing would get them out of it, and there is no use of drawing deeds unless one is sure they will be signed."

"But, my dear sir, I told you I was sure," replied Morton, in a tone of vexation; "he will sign it willingly—he was transported at the very idea."

"No, no, no—not transported yet!" cried Mr. Quatterly; "soon may be! for aught you or I know. He's on the high road, it would seem; and taking the high road is one step to transportation, if

not to the gallows. He 's in a spunging-house, I think you said. No fear of his not being well cleaned out, then, and fit for white-washing. Had he got any one with him?—a poor parson, who had spent too much in gin-and-water, and seven children, or anything of that sort; or a maiden lady of nine-and-thirty, who had been ruined by lawyers and *sal volatile*? Those are the sort of companions that make a man transported to get out."

"No, indeed," answered Morton,; "he had with him one Captain Tankerville, a very dangerous person, I believe."

"Oh, the villain!" cried Mr. Quatterly; "if he 's in, it is, indeed, high time to get the other out. If he carried in with him a single virtue, or a half-crown piece, that fellow will pick his pocket of it. But to set your mind at ease, I sat up last night for half an hour, and drew up a little memorandum, as good as a deed, which one of the clerks is just now writing out. It will be done before twelve, and you can pack him up in [a hamper as soon as it is signed, and send him off to Mallington by the night coach, taking care to put him in head foremost, and write upon the other side, 'Keep this side up!' it is his only chance of having his brain turned right again."

"But, my good friend, we must contrive to get

bail for him before I can bring him here," said Morton.

"Why, bail him yourself, or bring him in the sheriff's custody," said Mr. Quatterly. "My name will make them all compliance; but, I forgot—your mystery—your mystery!—and, methinks, you forgot too. If you come with him here, you will have your name shouted from clerk to clerk to split the welkin. That will never do. Let me see;" and turning to a book with two brass clasps, he read:—"Mr. Twistleton at eleven—Johnny Dunmow at three—Sir Arthur M'More at half-past. Well, I can go to him at half-past eleven, for Twistleton only wants to borrow fifteen thousand pounds on a mortgage in the moon. That's a property easily conveyed, and then I can go to the lad myself. You can meet me there, for he might prove refractory about leaving me to settle with the creditors, and then, as in the ring, it is as well to have a backer."

"But he cannot get out without the creditors being paid, or having security," replied Morton.

"Oh! people get out wonderfully," answered Mr. Quatterly; "and as to security, there is nothing so safe as a hackney-coach and a ten pound note, but one sometimes breaks down, and the others turn out forged. However, it is as well

not to bail him at all, for then he must either both sign and pay, or remain where he is, but you will never get your money, I can tell you, for his mother has the property for life."

"The loss will not be great," replied Morton, "and I shall be well satisfied if we succeed in rescuing him."

"And winning the fair lady," added Mr. Quatterly. "Well, Tommy Tucker turned a Turk for twopence; and, after all, it's a much more sensible thing to turn tomfool for a pretty girl, though, doubtless, the said Thomas Tucker, who turned Turk as aforesaid, looked to have a rever-sionary interest in certain Circassians of which his convertor was seized and possessed, as well as the mere consideration of twopence of lawful money of Great Britain, anything hereinbefore contained to the contrary notwithstanding, and so good-bye till a quarter to twelve."

CHAPTER XXIV.

ALFRED LATIMER and his dear new-found friend, Captain Tankerville, sat at their breakfast at about eleven o'clock, and the table was covered in a way that the drawing-room of the spunging-house seldom saw. What a curious sensation that very collocation "drawing-room — of a spunging-house" gives. Perhaps nothing on earth brings forth the painful points in any painful subject more than when some image is accidentally combined with it to which we have been accustomed to attach ideas of pleasure. The drawing-room of a spunging-house! The drawing-room of a prison! The place where we have been accustomed to spend pleasant hours, to enjoy our allotted portion of relaxation with those most dear to us, the name of that place connected with a prison!—with suffering and sorrow, and want and captivity! What a contrast in that strange combination! However,

there they sat ; the money which Latimer had got for his horse was not yet gone ; and with the true spirit of his class of men, he thought that as he was soon to be free and have somewhat more than two hundred pounds in his pocket, it mattered not how speedily the sum he had was spent. He had therefore invited Captain Tan-kerville to breakfast, and had ordered and paid for all sorts of things—broiled ham and fish, coffee and tea, muffins and rolls, sweatmeats and honey. The Cerberus of the house, at the first mention of his wants and wishes, had divined, from long experience, that the gentleman who had visited his prisoner the night before had come to announce his speedy liberation, and he consequently determined to make the most of his time. He got everything that was required, therefore, with great promptitude, and charged him three times the value for all. Never were such dear eggs set down upon a table ; never did York or Westphalia produce such extravagant ham ; never did a fishmonger ask such a price for fish. But it was then, and is in a degree now, a part of the law of England that all its officials should have a privilege of skinning the unfortunate, and trading in the follies of the foolish. It may be a good part of the law, but I do not see the morality thereof quite clearly.

Alfred Latimer had told his evil counsellor almost all that had taken place between him and Mr. Morton. He had not, indeed, told all, for Louisa's name had never been mentioned. There was something so pure, so sweet, so good in the very idea of the sister of his boyhood that, bad as he was, and hardened as he was growing, he shrunk from the very mention of her existence in the presence of one whom he instinctively felt to be coarse in mind, and gross in habit of thought.

“So,” said Captain Tankerville, with the slightest possible sneer upon his lip, “this Mr. Morton, it seems, wants to take you back and tie you to your mother's apron string again. If I were you, I wouldn't go ; I'd stop here in London as soon as I had got the money, if it were only just to show them that they couldn't make a baby or a fool of me any more.”

“So I should,” answered Alfred Latimer, laughing, “but I have other things that draw me to Mallington besides my mother's apron string. I've got some business to do there, Captain ; but as soon as that is done I shall come back again.”

“Well, I wish to Heaven !” said Captain Tankerville, “that while you are getting this money you would get fifty pounds for me. I can pay you in three months, but in the mean time it's a great bore to be kept in for thirty pounds all that time.”

"Oh! I'll lend you the fifty pounds," replied Alfred Latimer, "for there will be more than two hundred after paying all my debts, which I am to have to start me again."

"You are a devilish good fellow, Latimer," said his companion, "and I'm very much obliged to you; so much obliged, indeed, that I'll just give you a hint which you may take or not as you like. Here you are to get twelve hundred pounds. It is nobody's giving to you, but raised upon your own property; and so it is your own, therefore you may do what you like with it. Now, Timson, the officer, tells me that all the detainers against you do not amount to two hundred pounds, and if I were you I'd just pay them off, put the other thousand in my pocket, take a start for the continent, and let the rest of the scoundrels who have bills against me whistle for the money. Beyond doubt they have cheated you out of two-thirds of the amount, and I'd see them all — before I paid them."

"Oh! they have cheated me enough, I know," said Alfred Latimer, "and what you propose isn't a bad plan. I could easily run down from Mallington to Southampton," he continued musing, "and get over to Havre."

"To be sure you could," answered Captain Tankerville. "I did it once myself three or four

years ago. Instead of going over to Calais, where I thought they would be on the look out for me, I went round to Southampton and got clear off. The fact was I had been called out by Green, of the Dragoons. He was a devilish good shot, I knew, and so was I. Now I, being the man called out, had by right the first fire ; but my fool of a second gave that up, as they are getting into the habit of doing, and agreed that we should fire together. Both Green and I looked out sharply for the word ; and I am sure enough that we should both have gone head over heels together, but somehow or another I fired just half a second first, before the word was well out of Fitzherbert's mouth. I suppose I was a little nervous"—and he laughed with a low, unpleasant, meaning laugh. "However, they swore that I had fired before my time, and as Green was as dead as a door-nail it was expedient that I should take myself off as fast as possible. The two seconds, however, kept their own counsel, thanks to the law, which makes the seconds principals if the matter is brought in murder, so the affair was hushed up, but the two fools would never speak to me afterwards, just as if I were going to stand still and be shot through the head. Green would not have gone a bit the less for that, so it was just as well to take care of myself."

What might have been Alfred Latimer's reply to this very candid communication cannot be told ; for just as the other brought it to a conclusion, the Cerberus came up announcing Mr. Quatterly ; and the young gentleman had only time to ask " Who the devil's he ? " when the large head and shoulders of the worthy solicitor appeared, with the little legs walking busily underneath them. He looked at Captain Tankerville with a sardonic grin, his small black eyes sparkling unpleasantly, and the corners of his capacious mouth turning down.

" Ah, captain ! " he said, " you here ? You've changed your lodging I see—you're right, you're right—' To fresh fields and pastures new. ' "

" Of course I did not come here willingly, sir, " replied Captain Tankerville, " but I shall soon be out, that's one comfort. "

" No, no, no, " said Mr. Quatterly, " it may be a *come forth*, but not a *comfort*, surely "—and he laughed at his abominable pun—" but stay where you are, stay where you are. The Surrey side is best. Better air, even in King's-bench-walk than Horsemonger-lane, captain. "

" Sir, do you intend to insult me ? " asked the other, with his brow darkening ; " if so I shall know "—

" No, no, not at all, " replied Mr. Quatterly,

“not at all, captain. I’m a great coward; I never fight—I’m too big to fight; I never fought but once, and that was with my fists. Didn’t mean anything unpleasant, but you know the place where one last sees a man naturally recurs to one’s mind when next we meet him. You know my way, and how I rattle on, and you should only laugh at it—‘The little dog laughed,’ you know, ‘to see such sport, though the dish ran away with the spoon.’ But this is Mr. Latimer, I suppose. Sir, my business is with you.”

“Well, then, Latimer, I will not interrupt your business with this person,” said Captain Tankerville, with a very savage air; and he walked out of the room, finding the presence of Mr. Quatterly by no means a relaxation.

“Ha! ha! ha!” cried the good solicitor, sitting down. “Ha! ha! ha! Well, Mr. Latimer, adversity does make us acquainted with strange bed-fellows. But to business, sir. I wait upon you at the desire of a client of mine, Edward Wilmot, Esq., and another client of mine, Mr. Morton. The one has a sum of money to lend, the other has requested that it may be lent to you. He has explained the nature of the security; and as the deed cannot be properly drawn up for some time, I have brought a little memorandum of agreement which will serve the purpose in the interim, being un-

willing to keep you in such a place, and amongst such a set of scamps a moment longer than is necessary. I thought I should find Mr. Morton here."

Mr. Latimer at once commenced inquiries directed to find out how Mr. Quatterly intended to pay the money; but that gentleman informed him that it would be requisite to pay all the detaining creditors in the first place, and then to discharge the bills of all the others, a list of which had been obtained from Mrs. Charlton, to whom they had all at various times applied concerning her son's debts. "That done," he said, "I will hand over the balance to you."

Alfred Latimer, however, demurred to the payment of his debts by any other hands than his own, saying, "You do not think I should like to be arrested again, I suppose."

"Oh dear, no!" replied Mr. Quatterly; "not at all, not at all. Can have no objection to your paying them yourself; but you know, my dear sir, the detainers must be discharged, or you cannot get out."

"Yes, I know that," answered the young man; "but it would look as if I could not be trusted, if I were to have any one else pay the rest of the people but myself."

"Very true—so it would, so it would," said the

solicitor, who perfectly saw through the whole manœuvre, and suspected who had prompted it. “ Well, we will pay the detaining creditors first, and then leave you to settle with the others. But the sheriff’s office must first be searched, and we may as well have that done while we are waiting for Morton. I will go and send the man below to do it,” and he walked out, and closed the door behind him.

“ Be so good,” he said, as soon as he got into the den below, and had closed that door too, “ to send round as fast as possible to all those persons named in that list, and tell them, with my compliments, to lodge detainers against Alfred Latimer, Esq., for the amount of their bills before one o’clock, or they won’t be paid. Then, at half-past one search the office, and come up and report. Don’t go to the people yourself, that would not be regular. Send some one you can trust. Do you understand ? ”

“ Oh yes, Mr. Quatterly,” replied the man, winking his left eye, “ I twig,” and the solicitor returned to the young gentleman above, and entered into pleasant conversation with him.

“ Airy here ! ” he said, looking out of the window; “ airy, Mr. Latimer; and, doubtless, good society.”

“ Why, you do not seem to think the only

society I have got very pleasant," replied the other, "if one may judge by the way you spoke to Captain Tankerville."

"No offence meant, I can assure you, sir," replied the lawyer; "he has been twice accused of swindling, it is true, and once of forgery—all through a mistake, no doubt—all through a mistake; but, nevertheless, character is a very funny thing. It is very like a certain gentleman mentioned in history, and named Humpty Dumpty, about whom there is this legend:—

‘ Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall,
Humpty Dumpty got a great fall;
All the king’s horses and all the king’s men
Cannot set Humpty Dumpty where he was again.’

And so it is with a man’s reputation, Mr. Latimer. It takes a great many horses and a great many men to set up a character once fallen; friable materials, sir,—friable materials—easily cracked, and not easily mended."

Mr. Quatterly meant well, very well; and had Alfred Latimer been, as he supposed, a young man standing on the brink of evil, his observations would have been as well directed as they were meant; but there is a particular point of moral degradation where the sight of the dark gulf into which vice plunges man is more dangerous than serviceable, and that is when they are in it.

Such was the state of Alfred Latimer. He knew more of his own conduct than the man who spoke, and his only reflection was, "Well, then, there is no use of trying. I'm in for it, and must go on."

While these thoughts were passing through his mind, Mr. Morton was ushered in. After a few minutes had passed, the solicitor seemed to grow somewhat impatient, and inquired if Mr. Latimer knew the amount of debts already appearing against him in the sheriff's office?

The young gentleman answered boldly, "about two hundred pounds."

Mr. Quatterly replied, "Oh! if that is all, I have money enough at my banker's to give cheques for the amount; if it had been much more I must have gone home to get it. But this fellow is so long that I do not know what to do; I shall be too late for my next appointment."

"Perhaps you had better go to your appointment, my good sir," answered Morton, "and return with the amount."

"Well, perhaps I had," said Mr. Quatterly; "and I shall certainly return with *a mount* if I have to climb these dreadful stairs again. It will be better, too," he continued, looking at Morton, "because Mr. Latimer wishes to pay all the other bills himself."

“Indeed!” said Morton, gravely. “I thought you intended to return to Mallington at once, Latimer?”

“And so I do,” replied the young gentleman, sharply; “but I intend to stay a day in town first. There is no objection to that, I suppose.”

“I have no right to object, though I am sorry for it,” answered Morton, gravely.

“A letter, sir,” said a dirty-faced, sallow-gowned maid, putting a note into Mr. Latimer’s hands; “eightpence, if you please.” Those were days when penny postage had not been invented, and Alfred Latimer, paying the postage without further inquiry, except how the letter came to be so late, which was explained by the fact of its having gone to his former lodging, looked at the back as if the handwriting was strange to him.

Mr. Quatterly at the same time took his departure, saying he would soon be back, and Morton walked to the window to leave his companion to read the epistle he had just received at his ease. The contents, whatever they were, seemed to produce a strange change in Alfred Latimer, for, after having vented an oath, and the exclamation, “That she shan’t, by —!” he began to walk up and down the room in a state of great agitation.

“I say, Morton,” he continued, after a pause,

“ that d—d coach does not start till nine, I think. Would you mind joining me in a chaise down ? ”

“ I cannot wait till to-morrow,” replied his companion, “ otherwise I should be very happy.”

“ Ay, but I have changed my mind,” said Alfred Latimer ; “ I shall go down to-day as soon as this fellow returns. What a time he is ! Do you mind starting at once ? ”

“ Oh, no,” replied Morton, a little embarrassed. “ I must, indeed, go home for an hour, but I will rejoin you in that time, with a chaise, if you like.”

“ Well, do, do, there ’s a good fellow,” cried Alfred Latimer. “ You can go and get ready at once, if that ’s all.”

Morton smiled almost sadly, for he could conceive no very good motive which could have operated so sudden a change in a man of Alfred Latimer’s disposition ; but, agreeing to his proposal, he took his departure, and left him alone. The moment he was gone the young gentleman hurried to his dirty bed-chamber, gathered together the few clothes he had with him, and placed them in a portmanteau, which he had brought from the lodgings where he had been arrested.

At the end of that time there was a knock at the street door, and the voice of the sheriff’s-officer

was heard speaking to his man as they entered together, almost immediately succeeded by another knock and the tones of Mr. Quatterly. The sheriff's-officer and the solicitor then walked up stairs together, and Mr. Latimer was called out of his bed-room.

Now the officer was a very different personage from his man—a very tall, thin, neat personage, in a blue satin cravat, tied tight, and his voice was sweet and complacent. “Happy to hear it's all arranged, Mr. Latimer,” he said. “I have been down to search the office, and find a few little matters lodged this morning. Let me see, I'll just run them up;” and, sitting down, he soon made out an account, amounting to nine hundred and seventy pounds, which, with costs, charges, &c. swelled the whole to about one thousand and nine.

Alfred Latimer gazed with astonishment.—“Why, Tankerville told me, Mr. Quincy,” he said, “that there was but two hundred.”

“Ay, sir, that was the day before yesterday,” replied the officer. “These have come in since;” and he ran his finger down a long list at the bottom of a paper he held in his hand.

“It does not matter, you know, my dear Mr. Latimer,” observed Mr. Quatterly, putting on a pair of tortoise-shell spectacles. “As they were

all to be paid, it is better to get it all over at once ; save you trouble, you know, and be sooner done. There are few men who ever, like the man in the moon, come down too soon to find their way to Norwich ; and you 'll have more time to amuse yourself if you do stay in London till to-morrow."

" I am going down at once, sir," said Alfred Latimer, in a sullen tone ; " Mr. Morton is to bring a chaise directly."

" Ay, a sensible man, Mr. Morton," rejoined Mr. Quatterly ; " a very sensible, excellent man, indeed. Few like him, sir ; few like him.—But now, Mr. Quincy, to business."

And that business was soon settled. The bills were paid in full by Mr. Quatterly ; the costs in part, for he thought fit to dock some excessive charges ; and the sheriff's officer knew his character too well to make aught but faint resistance in his own case, and contented himself with Mr. Quatterly's engagement to pay the rest of the amount, if it could be legally enforced, in the case of others.

When all this was settled, the worthy solicitor turned to Mr. Latimer, saying, " And now, sir, there 's the chaise, I hear : Morton is the most punctual man on earth—always to the tick of the clock. And now, Mr. Latimer, after the little expenses of the agreement, &c., there is a sum due

to you of one hundred and—let me see—call it one hundred and ninety pounds. We can settle any other little matter afterwards, will you have it in money or a cheque?"

"All in money," answered Alfred Latimer; and Mr. Quatterly's pocket-book instantly disgorged the amount. Morton was in the room a moment after; and though there was a little anger in Alfred Latimer's heart at being frustrated in his hopes of receiving the larger sum, yet he was even more eager than ever to return to Mallington without a moment's delay, and, as soon as it was announced that he was free, he descended the stairs, and sprang into the chaise, without giving one thought or one word to Captain Tankerville. Such are the friendships of the bad. The other saw him depart from the window; and, clenching his fist, with a fearful oath, he exclaimed, "The blackguard has bilked me; but, curse me! if I don't do for him some day."

CHAPTER XXV.

THE conversation of Morton, as they rolled along, did Alfred Latimer more good than that of Mr. Quatterly had done. Although, as we have hitherto seen him, he had shown himself somewhat grave—for there had been many thoughts and feelings of deep interest in his heart and mind—yet he was by no means constitutionally a sad or sombre man. He was one of great powers of imagination ; but those powers were disposed quite as often to exercise themselves on gay as on serious subjects. He was not the creature of impulse or of the moment; but his mind dealt with things as he found them, subjecting all to the influence of itself, but still not putting forth its strength to throw a snow-ball as it would have heaved a rock. There was ever, indeed, in his gayest of moods, somewhat of thought which showed that the stream ran deep beneath the ripple, and in his most serious moments some-

what of fancy, which evinced that the present cares had brighter aspirations beyond them.

In the present instance, indeed, though from much that had passed he had received a grave, nay a sad impression, yet he strove to be cheerful, and to force his thoughts from painful realities and very dark anticipations, to the less stern and gloomy objects which the passing scene presented. And what a city is London for every suggestion that the mind of man can desire—whether for bright and cheerful, or for shadowy and desponding—with its life and activity, its eagerness and its intense worldliness ; its fierce passions, and its light absurdities ; its marvellous selfishness, and its still more surprising benevolence ! There never was anything—nay, not in Greece or Rome, nor even in those wide deserted eastern plains that once were the nest of cities thronged with life—anything so wonderful as that great capital, in the strangeness of its contrasts ; and yet, by what fine and beautiful gradations, by what a magical softening of semi-tints, the strong lights and the dark shades blend into each other !

For three or four miles the journey of the travellers lay through the metropolis ; first through that portion called the City, where the eternal roll of wheels, and the everlasting movement of interminable crowds deafened the ear and dazzled

the eye; and yet never did the result of that extraordinary combination of habit and of reason, of law and of will, of good feeling and of self-interest, which forms the great constraining bond of society, appear more conspicuous in order and propriety. There might be things to shock the eye or to offend the ear—there might be inconveniences, quarrels, impediments; but still the human tide flowed on in cheerfulness and regularity, still one made way for another, still the savage in man's heart was overruled by the silent inert power of the multitude, and the selfish eagerness of the few gave way to the sense of the many.

After that the chaise rolled on through what is termed the more fashionable part of the town, and the very desertion of the streets at that period of the year showed that the travellers had entered a quarter where another spirit reigned. Long rows of houses with closed shutters—squares with scarcely an inhabitant remaining in them (but some old servant left to keep the mansion in order) presented themselves as they went on. But even here were gradations marking the narrow limits of fashion. First came the streets of shops, not nearly so gay or so thronged as in a more propitious time of the year; the equipages thundering no more along the pavement, the footway uncrowded, and many of the master

tradesmen themselves absent on some of those expeditions to the sea side, which have made foreigners believe that the English citizen, like the anchovy, will not keep without pickling: then the abodes of the higher classes, utterly vacant, or if not so, with blinds drawn down, and every sign of absence, in the pitiful vanity of being afraid of doing what others do not do, then the mixed atmosphere, where the little ape the great—affecting their follies without being able to imitate their better qualities, and striving to follow them in magnificence, without having the means of equalling them in expense.

On all and each of these scenes Morton had something to remark, and though his companion was silent and morose, he persevered in trying to lead him to reason and to think, believing that exercise of mind is one of the best remedies for mental maladies, as exercise of the limbs is for those of the body. Nor was he altogether unsuccessful; for after having remained sullen for some time, Alfred Latimer began to converse; and if not very reasonably, yet the effect was so far good that it weaned him from the angry feelings which he had been indulging in regard to the disappointment he had experienced. His conversation, it is true, was restrained; for Morton and he had few subjects in common, and

he was also unwilling to let the other behold any part of what was passing in the deeper chamber of the heart. He felt as if he were playing a game with a skilful adversary, and must not let him see his cards—that sad, that fatal mistake, which all who are carried away by their passions make, of regarding the most friendly hand that would arrest the horses that are running away with them to destruction, as that of an enemy.

“It is strange,” said Morton, as they rolled through the crowded streets of the city, “and yet beautiful as strange, that if one could trace each of the multitude that is passing by us, and examine his fate and history, we should find, as a general result, that the cheerful and happy face, the light and easy heart, is the property of one who has his passions and his conduct under due control.”

“I do not know that at all,” answered Latimer, “we find plenty of very good people who are very miserable.”

“Not long, and not often,” answered Morton; “of course I mean in the aggregate. It is undoubtedly true that sorrows and misfortunes do affect the best, and from that very fact one author of great talent, but no very strong religious feelings—I mean Voltaire—has drawn an inference of a future state where there shall be compensa-

tion for such suffering ; yet, when griefs and anxieties do fall upon the good, how much more easily do they bear them, with how much more resignation and calmness than the wicked."

"I do not see why that should be," answered Alfred Latimer ; "if I were a good man, and I never pretend to anything of the kind, I should only be the more angry and indignant at being punished for no offence."

"That is not the usual course of human nature, Latimer," replied Morton. "We always bear chastisement which we have deserved more impatiently than that which we have not."

"But I do not see that you have any cause to judge from all these people's faces that the good are a bit happier than the bad," rejoined his companion ; "look at that fellow there, coming along with such a dark, eager look, as if he would cut everybody's throat that stopped him. Now, from his dress and his manner, and from the low bow which that shopkeeper is making him, I would bet any money he is some rich merchant or man upon change, with his pockets full of gold, and everything on earth that he can desire."

"Not improbable," replied Morton ; "he looks very much the sort of man you have described."

"Well, then, I am sure he does not look happy," rejoined Alfred Latimer.

“ Most likely he is the reverse,” said Morton, with a smile ; “ but that is quite consistent with what I said. It was, that those who are the happiest—ay, and who generally look the happiest too—are those who have their passions under due control. Now, a man may have everything on earth he can desire, as you say, and yet be rendered miserable by not having his passions under due control. For aught we know, that very merchant or banker, or whatever he is, may have the passion for wealth upon him to such an extent as to be as much or more a vice than the love of women or the dice-box is to others. I spoke of all passions, not of one or two ; and one of the great mistakes which the world in general makes is to select a certain class of vices from the many, as the objects of reprobation and punishment. We are full of conventionalities, which render us more tolerant to some classes of evil—ay, even to greater or more heinous crimes —than others. Some are even the objects of praise and approbation ; and many, very many vices, as society is constituted, are the sure roads to worldly prosperity—but, mark, I do not say to happiness ; that is a very different thing. What is a greater vice than the greed of gold—not the honest desire of independence, not the honourable effort to rise by genius, industry, and persever-

ance? I look upon that man who devotes his whole soul to the accumulation of wealth, who stints and wears down the inferior drudges who aid him in its acquisition that he may have the greater share, who refuses to open his hand or his heart to misery and want, or only undraws his purse for the world's applause—even if he commit no fraud, no deceit, to gain his ends—I look upon that man, I say, as more vicious than the mere libertine."

Alfred Latimer relapsed into silence. His companion's reasoning did not convince him; for he had never formed to himself any other idea of happiness than the satisfaction of his wishes, nor could he form any conception of it. He had found, indeed, that even where he had had the power of attaining that which he believed to be all he wanted, it had not produced content. Morton's words served, at least, to show him that there were other sorts of happiness than any he had dreamed of, and he mused over the suggestion, assailed by thoughts to which he would not give admission.

At length, however, the observations of the solicitor came back to his memory, and he drew from them a long train of reasonings in his own mind, all tending to confirm him in the course he was determined to pursue. "It is never any use,"

he said suddenly, “for any man who has once taken a way for himself different from what the world call right, to seek to change it; for, as that Mr. What’s-his-name remarked, no man can ever get himself into good repute again; and even were that possible, he would himself always have a hankering after the things in which he had indulged himself, which would get the better of him sooner or later.”

“Oh dear, no!” exclaimed Morton, laughing; “if that were the case I am afraid half of our young men in England would only go on from bad to worse all their lives. Few in the unbridled days of youth do not commit many errors. Many, very many, even in more mature years fall before some overpowering temptation; but God forbid that either the one or the other should shut us out from all return. It is only against the man who wilfully and deliberately chooses the wrong course as that which he is determined to follow that the door can be said to be closed. For every other there is always an opportunity of retreading his steps—of abandoning evil, and seeking right. He may have to struggle against habit as well as passion, that is true. It is a natural consequence of his faults, and, if he thinks rightly, a well-deserved punishment. Then, as to what was said by Mr. Quatterly, I think you must have mistaken him.

He could only allude to persons who, by some base and dishonourable action, had deprived themselves for ever of the esteem of honest men."

Alfred Latimer fell into thought again. He asked himself, perhaps, if he were in that position, and he might feel that if he had not all the symptoms of the disease, he had at least caught the infection. The reflection was not pleasant to him; but yet he indulged it till it became too oppressive to bear, and then casting it off he roused himself to converse on anything else.

Thus passed the time till night began to fall. The sunset was magnificent, and they had full opportunity of observing it, [for they were just then crossing a wild elevated common, where frequent, sudden, and precipitous falls of the ground, at the distance of only a few yards from the high road, showed them a wide extended scene to westward, with long lines of blue shadow and bright light crossing the country, and the glowing sky of evening beyond. All in that quarter was clear, with the exception of some dark films drawn across the burning horizon; but to the south large rounded clouds were rising, heavy and leaden, as if a thunder-storm were at hand. Yet ere the travellers had crossed the common, and before the sun had completely sunk, the sharp defined edges had softened off, and the

clouds rapidly advancing, spread half over the sky. About two miles farther on there was a change of horses, and by this time it was dark, with a few drops of rain beginning to fall. The post-boys were long in bringing out the horses, and Alfred Latimer was all impatience to get on ; so that when Morton proposed to have lights, saying that the man would hardly be able to see, the young gentleman replied, “ Oh, d—n it, no ; do not let us wait for that. It is but ten miles to Mallington, and he ought to know his way in the dark.”

On they went, then, with the rain falling fast, the sky quite covered with clouds, the sun down, and the moon far below the horizon. It was as dark as pitch, not a ray of light served to guide them, and the very road was hardly to be distinguished from the grass beside it, the drenching torrent having changed its colour from a light yellow to a dark brown. The storm pelted against the windows, and rattled upon the top of the chaise, and large drops of water found their way in through the crevices. Still the postillion rode on in his jacket, either following the invariable custom of his fellows, never to put on a great-coat till they are wet through, or fearing to leave his horses, one of which was somewhat unmanageable, in order to get at it. At length, going

on at a furious rate for little more than an hour, they reached Mallington Common, and there, apparently thinking that as they had nearly arrived at the end of their journey, it might be as well to protect himself from the storm, the driver stopped and got down.

Instantly Alfred Latimer thrust his head out of the window, demanding, "What the devil are you stopping for now? You are just at Mallington. Go on to the inn."

"I'll only just get my great-coat, sir," replied the driver, and at the same moment he advanced towards the splinter-bar.

The young gentleman swore a loud oath, and whether the horses heard it and did not approve of it, or took it for an intimation to go on, they started off at once, broke from a trot into a canter, and from a canter to a gallop.

Morton sat calmly in the back of the carriage without moving hand or foot; but Alfred Latimer exclaimed aloud, "Confusion and the devil! they will break our necks down the hill, or have us into the river. By —— they are off the road! They will be into the gravel-pit. I will jump out."

But before he could execute his purpose, or Morton could beseech him to desist, the chaise received a violent jerk, then plunged forward,

leaning to one side, as the near fore-wheel went over a bank, then rolled over and over with a terrible crash, and at length fell on its side, and lay with something striking hard against the front panels, like the feet of a horse in agony.

CHAPTER XXVI.

“LATIMER!” said Morton, raising himself partly in the carriage, with great pain, for he was severely bruised. But Alfred Latimer made no reply; and, putting his arm through the broken window, his companion opened the door of the carriage and got out. The darkness was profound, the rain falling in torrents, and it was impossible to see anything but the dark outline of a steep bank, down which the chaise had rolled, the vehicle itself, nearly broken to pieces, and the two horses, one lying perfectly still, the other still kicking in the traces, but more and more faintly every moment. A sound, however, was heard above, as of some one running, and Morton raised his voice and shouted aloud. At first he was not heard, but he called again, and then the post-boy answered from the bank above, exclaiming, “Good heaven! where are you, sir?”

“Here, at the bottom of the bank,” answered

Morton ; " Mr. Latimer is much hurt. Run as fast as possible to Mallington House, bring down several of the men, and a large chair or board, and lights. Lose not a moment ; but bid them not alarm Mrs. Charlton till we ascertain the truth. Be quick, be quick ! "

The man ran off again, knowing that he could render no assistance, even to his horses, without the means of seeing where they were ; and Morton remained by the side of the vehicle. He himself felt that though severely bruised, he was not seriously injured, and tying a handkerchief round his hand, which had been cut by the glass, he leaned over the chaise, and tried to discover how Latimer was lying. A moment after he heard a step, and then a voice exclaiming, " Did not some one halloo out just now ? Who 's there ? "

" We have been overturned into the pit," answered Morton. " Is there any place nearer than Mallington where we can get help, my friend ? for Mr. Latimer here is much hurt, if not dead."

" The devil he is !" cried the man, who had now come near, and seemed, as far as the darkness would allow Morton to judge, to be a stout-built short man ; " that 's a bad job indeed. But we 'll get help very soon from Widow Brown's cottage ; 't is but a stone's throw. I 'll be back directly."

"Bring a light," said Morton, "if you can get a lantern."

"Ay, ay, sir," answered the man, and away he ran. In five minutes, or not much more, the gentleman who remained by the chaise saw a dim spark like a will-o'-the-wisp, moving at a little distance, and then heard voices. Then, coming on through the rain, with their figures becoming more distinctly visible by the light of a horn lantern which one of them carried, he perceived two men and a woman. They did not, indeed, seem of a very prepossessing appearance, by the yellow glare that fell upon their countenances when they approached; but, with good forethought, one of the men had brought a large rug, in which to move the gentleman who had been most injured.

The first thing to be done, however, was to ascertain his exact condition; and, taking the lantern, Morton held it into the chaise, and by its light discovered Alfred Latimer lying just where he had fallen, with a good deal of blood about his face. His hand was still round one of the holders in the inside of the vehicle, and his companion could perceive that the fingers seemed every now and then to tighten and then relax their grasp.

While he was making these observations, one

of the men said in a low voice to the other, “That horse that’s under is as dead as a stone, and this has broke his fore leg right through.”

“Here, d—n the horses! lend me a hand to make this rug into a sort of hammock, to carry Mr. Latimer up to the cottage,” said the other man. “Is he living or dead, sir?” he continued, addressing Morton.

“He is living,” answered Morton, “and I trust only stunned. Cut that strap which keeps the door from going further back, and then, if one goes to the top and another kneels on the side, we can lift him out without shaking him much.”

The men obeyed him readily, while the woman —a tall, gaunt, hard-featured dame of sixty-five —held the lantern; and Morton bending down into the chaise, lifted him gradually, while the man who was lying flat on the side of the vehicle, supported part of the weight, and the other at the top guarded his head with his hands. He was thus speedily drawn out of the broken chaise, and seated by the side, with Morton supporting his head upon his arm. He groaned twice or thrice while this was taking place, and it was now evident that he still breathed without much oppression.

“Now, sir, let us carry him to the cottage, and lay him flat down on a bed,” said the short

sailor-like man, who formed one of the party ; “ that’s the best thing for him till the doctor can be fetched.”

“ It would be better to carry him home at once,” replied Morton ; “ Mallington House cannot be far, if I judge rightly where we are.”

“ It’s more nor a mile, and that a good un,” said the woman.

“ Besides, the cottage is just in the way,” rejoined the man ; “ he can be moved after the doctor comes, if he thinks it safe.”

“ If the house be as far as that, the cottage will be best,” replied Morton ; “ but I thought this pit was close to Mallington.”

“ You’re thinking of what we call the first pit,” replied the other man ; “ this is the third.”

Alfred Latimer was then placed in the rug, which by this time had been gathered together with twine at the two ends, and the woman going before with the lantern, the two men carried him forward on a little path, which was scarcely traceable along the bottom of the gravel pit. The party then issued out upon the common, but they had not reached the higher ground when two or three lights were seen coming a little to the right, and a horse’s feet were heard upon the road.

“ Here are the people from Mallington House,” said Morton.

"Ay, and that's the doctor's horse," rejoined the woman; "I'd know his trot among a thousand—I'll give him a call;" and raising her voice to an unearthly shriek, she shouted "Hie! doctor, doctor! Dr. Nethersole!"

The horse's feet were checked in an instant, and as they paused they soon saw the worthy surgeon leading his horse carefully across towards the spot where he perceived their light.

"Goodness, gracious, sir! this is a sad affair," said Mr. Nethersole, as soon as he saw Morton. "You seem to be much hurt yourself. But how is Mr. Latimer? Is he dead?" he continued, gazing anxiously at the burden carried by the two men.

"No," answered Morton; "he is not dead. That, at least is certain, but he is quite insensible. These good people say there is a cottage near, where he can be taken. Will it be better to go thither or to proceed to Mallington House?"

"Oh! to the cottage on every account," said Mr. Nethersole. "No time is to be lost; and besides, Mrs. Charlton, who is luckily out at dinner with the Markhams, would be dreadfully shocked if she arrived just as her son was being brought in in such a state."

According to Mr. Nethersole's desire, the men proceeded at once to the cottage, which lay in a

little nook of the common, not a hundred yards further on ; and the young gentleman having been laid on a bed in the back room of the lower story, the surgeon proceeded to examine him, while the room became gradually crowded with servants and other people from Mallington. Morton stood near while the surgeon pursued his investigation, and gave him every aid in his power while he felt the head, traced the position and line of the limbs, and ascertained that no fracture had taken place ; but Morton could not, even while thus occupied, avoid hearing the remarks of several of the inhabitants of Mallington who had come up with the servants of the house, in regard to the general character of Mother Brown, as she was called, her son, and their associates, which were not very much in their favour.

Mr. Nethersole, after due perquisitions and a little touch of medical mystery, declared that no bones were broken, but that, though the skull was not fractured, yet he feared concussion of the brain had taken place, for which bleeding would be immediately necessary, and, after that, perfect quiet. It was quite out of the question, therefore, he said, to remove the young gentleman to Mallington, as, if done in the first instance, venesection might come too late, and if attempted afterwards, fever might be superinduced. After this oration,

he ordered the young gentleman to be undressed, and placed in the bed where he lay. He then bled him somewhat largely, and the effect was certainly such as he could have desired, for, as the blood flowed, Alfred Latimer drew two or three deep sighs, opened his eyes, and looked about him.

Mr. Nethersole placed his finger on his lip, saying “Not a word, my dear sir. Lie perfectly still ; take no notice of anything ; open not your mouth, or I will not answer for the consequences. Let the room be cleared, and open that window. Now one of the servants must stay with the young gentleman till I can return. I will sit up with him myself to watch the symptoms as they appear ; but he must not be left while I am necessarily absent for an hour or an hour and a half. Here, Wilkinson, you are the very man. Sit by Mr. Latimer till I return ; do not let him speak or move till I come back ; and you, Widow Brown, keep the house quite quiet. No gossiping, no talking, no drinking and squabbling, remember. I know you all, you know ; and I will have my orders obeyed.”

Widow or Mother Brown promised compliance in a very humble tone; for Mr. Nethersole, or “the doctor,” as he was called, was a very important personage with her class. After having

given these directions, and seen the room dis-encumbered of the crowd, the surgeon again sat down by the sick man's side, felt his pulse, nodded with a well-satisfied look, and then rose, saying, in an oracular tone, "The circulation greatly relieved. I will be back soon, my dear sir, and bring something to compose you. Now, Mr. Morton, if you like we had better walk back to Mallington ; I think you will need a little attention yourself, and the fewer persons round Mr. Latimer the better."

"Very well," replied Mr. Morton ; and, bending down, he added, "Good-by, for the present, Latimer ; I will see you early to-morrow."

"Why, what the devil is all this about, Morton ?" asked Alfred Latimer ; "I have broke my head somehow."

But Mr. Nethersole instantly interfered, holding up his finger with a grave look, and saying, "Not a word, not a word, as you value your life. Come, Mr. Morton, come ;" and, walking out with the young gentleman, they issued forth upon the common.

Morton's first question was in regard to Mr. Nethersole's real opinion of Alfred Latimer's situation ; but who ever got a direct answer from a medical man ? However he made out from the cloud of pros and cons in which the surgeon en-

veloped his opinion, that he did not see any very dangerous symptoms at that time, but that the young gentleman having decidedly received a slight concussion of the brain might at any moment during the next three or four days become suddenly worse. Mr. Nethersole would then have fain ascertained exactly how the accident had occurred, remembering duly that he had an account to render to all the old ladies of Mallington. But Morton, in the first place, thought fit to satisfy himself as to what was the state of affairs at Mallington House, inquiring whether Mr. Nethersole could tell at what hour Mrs. Charlton would return, and whether there was any chance of the news being carried to her where she was dining?"

"No," answered the surgeon, promptly; "the man you sent acted with great discretion I find: for, on hearing that Mrs. Charlton was out,—What a sweet creature she is! don't you think so, Mr. Morton?—he made two men servants come down with him to me without going in at all, lest Miss Charlton should by some means hear of the event, and be frightened out of her life."

"Then Miss Charlton did not go with Mrs. Charlton?" asked Morton.

"No, my dear sir, she declined," answered the surgeon. "You know the young gentleman there

has been rather particular in his attentions, and people do say that he is not very agreeable to the young lady. Ha, ha, ha!—you understand."

"Perfectly," replied Morton, drily; "but I think it might be as well if I were to go in, as we pass Mallington House, and give Miss Charlton the first news of Mr. Latimer's situation myself. She can afterwards break it to his mother in a more gentle manner than any man could do."

The surgeon agreed fully that such a plan was a very proper one; and perhaps he had some faint notion, that the young gentleman might wish to have five minutes of Miss Charlton's company alone, and that she might not object to grant it. Whatever was Morton's view, they walked straight up to the gates of Mallington House; and there, while Mr. Nethersole was urging his young companion to come down to him as soon as his conference with Miss Charlton was over, and have his own injuries examined, all their plans were disarranged by the rush up of Mrs. Charlton's carriage, and by her instant recognition of the two gentlemen, as the butler came forth with a light to open the outer-gates in answer to their summons.

CHAPTER XXVII.

“ Ah, Mr. Morton! is that you?” cried Mrs. Charlton, letting down the carriage window: “ Come in; pray, come in.”

The carriage dashed on up to the house; and, though the distance from the gate to the door was not more than twenty or thirty yards, the lady had descended from her vehicle, tripped into the house, and walked up stairs, before Morton and Mr. Nethersole arrived. The latter gentleman understanding that, in the changed circumstances of the case, he would not be one too many, thinking, too, that if Mrs. Charlton were by any chance to faint at the tidings of her son’s situation his assistance might be necessary, and, like the Barber of Bagdad, having his lancet ready, and his bandages in his pocket, he judged that he might as well walk in with the young gentleman, and take his share of things to come.

Morton advanced first with a grave air, and

asked the butler if he had said anything to his mistress regarding the accident.

“ No, sir,” replied the man. “ She asked why I came out to open the gates ; and I only replied, because Wilkinson was out. I thought you could tell her better than I could, sir.”

It was a task, however, that Morton could gladly have dispensed with ; for he was neither fond of inflicting nor of witnessing pain : but nevertheless, fortifying his mind for the undertaking, he proceeded slowly up the stairs, and entered the drawing-room, the door of which Mrs. Charlton had left open behind her. The lady was standing in a graceful attitude, with her hand leaning on a table, while a sweet and courteous smile illumined her countenance, and welcomed Mr. Morton before he appeared. Louisa, who had exchanged a few words with her step-mother, was seated on a sofa, with a book before her, and her lovely face, too, was raised towards the door, with a look of well-pleased expectation—ay, and something more than expectation ; for there was a light in her deep eyes, that let one see beyond them to her heart far more than she intended—the light of Love, beaming from two as sweet lamps as ever he kindled ! The moment, however, that Morton appeared, with the blood still upon his face and his hand tied up, her cheek turned deadly pale.

She spoke not a word, but she rose at once, and then feeling her knees tremble caught the arm of the sofa for support. She knew how she loved him then, if she had never fully known it before.

Mrs. Charlton, on her part, uttered a pretty little scream, and exclaimed, "Good Heaven! Mr. Morton, what has happened? You have met with some accident! You are hurt!"

"Very little, my dear madam," replied the young gentleman; "indeed, scarcely at all. My face has been scratched with some broken glass, and my hand cut; but we have every reason to be most thankful that the accident was not worse, for it might well have proved fatal to myself and my companion, instead of inflicting a few wounds and bruises, which will be well in a few days."

The sound of his voice, and the firm tone in which he spoke, comforted Louisa a good deal; but still she felt very faint, and she sat down again, not at all sure how long she could stand.

Now, Mrs. Charlton was alarmed too, for she was very quick in the combination of her ideas; and there were three distinct facts before her, from which she drew a deduction very near the truth. There was Mr. Morton hurt; he acknowledged having a companion in misadventure; and that companion was not now with him. If that gentleman had nothing of very great importance

to communicate, he would not have thus presented himself at Mallington House, she thought, till he had washed his face and hands. If her son had been able, he would have come with him. Her son was unable, and that was the important fact Morton came to communicate. All this passed through her mind in a moment, and she felt very much alarmed ; but Mrs. Charlton was not a woman to faint. It was a thing that she never did ; and this was certainly not an occasion on which she would have commenced the practice. She was very fond of her son, it is true, and she had spoiled and indulged him very greatly in youth. But it was not for his sake she had done so, it was for her own. She loved him as her right hand, or her right eye, because he was a part of herself ; and, perhaps, she would sooner have lost her right hand or her right eye than him, if she could have done so without any pain or danger. Limb against son, she would not have hesitated, I think ; but if suffering—personal suffering, or risk—were thrown into the scale with mutilation, I'm afraid Alfred Latimer would have had but a poor chance.

“ Speak, my dear sir!—speak, Mr. Morton,” she said, “ you have more to tell—Alfred was with you, is it not so? Alfred is hurt?—tell me the truth, my dear friend. I can bear it.”

The last were nearly the same words which she had used when the servant ran in to inform her that her first husband had destroyed himself; and she did bear it with wonderful philosophy.

Morton answered in a manner to remove anxiety as far as possible without deviating from truth.

“He is much better, my dear Mrs. Charlton,” he said; “he was apparently a good deal hurt at first, but he recovered wonderfully as soon as Mr. Nethersole bled him. There are no bones broken, happily, though he was for a time stunned by the fall.”

“Thank God!” cried Mrs. Charlton; and Louisa echoed her words with truer devotion.

The surgeon advanced to play his part; for, during the short dialogue which had taken place Morton had purposely put himself forward, fearing that Mr. Nethersole might so overload his account with medical terms that the two ladies might be left in ignorance of whether Alfred Latimer were dead or alive. That worthy gentleman now proceeded to justify his caution by explaining to Mrs. Charlton, in the darkest possible manner, the situation of her son; and what he had at first apprehended, as well as what was now to be guarded against. For aught that the mother could gather from this communication

Alfred might have been a marmalade ; but Morton stepped in to her help, saying, “ I see you do not exactly understand Mr. Nethersole. It is merely that Latimer has now quite recovered both his speech and his senses ; and though our good friend thinks it would be imprudent to remove him from the cottage to which he was at first taken, yet there was no great chance of any danger resulting from the accident. Is it not so, Mr. Nethersole ? ”

“ Precisely, sir,” replied the surgeon ; and Mrs. Charlton, sinking into a chair, gazed in Morton’s face, thinking what she ought to do next.

“ I should very much like to go to him,” she said, after a moment’s pause ; “ but the carriage has gone away, I fear, and ”—

“ It rains dreadfully,” said Mr. Nethersole, finishing Mrs. Charlton’s sentence nearly as she would have finished it herself. “ Do not think of it, my dear madam, I will stay with him all night. I propose to return immediately.”

“ I do not see any necessity for your going,” added Morton, “ for he is so much better that I doubt not a few hours will remove all chance of danger, and Mr. Nethersole particularly recommends quiet. One of your servants—Wilkinson, I think, is his name—is with your son.”

“ Thank you, Mr. Morton—thank you,” said

Mrs. Charlton ; “ you are very kind to me, in every respect—kinder than any one of my own relations, I am sure ; and how I can ever be grateful enough I cannot tell. But pray let me hear how this accident has happened.”

“ I beg pardon for interfering,” said Mr. Nethersole, with a smile, “ but I must really here exert my authority as a disciple of Galen. Mr. Morton is hurt, Mrs. Charlton ; we none of us know how much—for he has given himself up entirely to Mr. Latimer, and has taken no care of himself whatever.”

Louisa who, as the reader has remarked, had not spoken a word, raised her eyes to Morton’s face with a look of tenderness mingled with fear, as if imploring him, for her sake, to attend to his own safety ; but Mr. Nethersole went on,—“ He is wet through, too, so that it is high time that he should change his dress, and allow me to inquire into the injuries he has received. Wounds and bruises, apparently slight at first, are often the most dangerous if not attended to. Before he gives any account of what has taken place, then, I say authoritatively, let him go home.”

“ Home !” exclaimed Mrs. Charlton, in a fit of enthusiasm, “ can Mr. Morton have any home in Mallington but this house, after all that he has done for its inmates ? I will take no re-

fusal, Mr. Morton; ring the bell, Louisa, my love."

Louisa rang without an instant's delay; and as Morton was excusing himself on account of having no change of dress there, saying that his portmanteau had been left with the chaise on the common, she joined her all-persuading voice, exclaiming, "Oh! do Mr. Morton. Clothes can be soon got from the inn."

"Well, I must obey," answered Morton, with a smile, and as the butler entered, Mrs. Charlton exclaimed, "Tell Windsor to have the yellow room got ready for Mr. Morton directly."

"And send down to the inn for what Mr. Morton wants," added Louisa, for the first time giving any orders in her own house.

"I think your portmanteau is here, sir," said the butler; "I told the gardener to bring everything out of the chaise, for Widow Brown and her people are not to be trusted where they can pilfer."

"You are a wise and prudent man," said Mr. Nethersole; "they are, indeed, not the most honest set in the world; but have Mr. Morton's things taken up, and while the room is getting ready, I can examine how far he is hurt."

"I am really not hurt at all," replied Morton, addressing Louisa, more than the last speaker.

“I am an old soldier, accustomed to knocks and bruises, and not made of very fragile materials originally. But if it must be so, I submit; and if I find you up when I return, my dear madam, I will tell you how all this unfortunate affair took place.”

“Up!” cried Mrs. Charlton; “why, it is only a quarter to ten yet. The truth is, those Markhams are such bores, and one hears so little of anything but dogs and horses, partridges, pheasants, and foxes, that I always order the carriage a quarter before nine, and in such a night as this one could not keep the servants out.”

While Morton and Mr. Nethersole were gone, Mrs. Charlton questioned the butler as to what he knew of the accident, and obtained the general facts, as far as the man knew them. The chaise had been overturned into the gravel-pit, he said, both the horses killed, and the carriage broken all to pieces, having fallen down a bank full fifty feet high. This, indeed, was an exaggeration, but it served with the rest of the story to make poor Louisa’s heart feel cold, and her cheek to turn deadly pale. Mrs. Charlton went on questioning him, however, for nearly a quarter of an hour, not at all minding, perhaps not comprehending, the mental torture which her step-daughter was enduring; and at the end of

that time Morton returned with the blood washed from his face, and his fine hair waving over his forehead, brought a little more forward than ordinary, to hide a wound upon his temple, which Mr. Nethersole had just covered with black plaster.

That gentleman accompanied his new patient; but after a few words of assurance to Mrs. Charlton and Louisa that Mr. Morton was not severely hurt, and giving a warning to him that he had better keep himself as quiet as possible for the next two days, for fear of producing feverish symptoms, he retired to visit his own house for a few minutes, and then once more cross the common in the midst of the drenching rain, to sit up through the night with Alfred Latimer. Truly the life of a country apothecary is a hard one.

Leaving Mr. Nethersole, however, to pursue his way, we must sit down with Mrs. Charlton, Mr. Morton, and Louisa, in the comfortable drawing-room at Mallington. The reader can very well divine how Morton explained what had occurred without our entering into the details of what he said. He was not, indeed, one of those men who love to be the hero of their own story, nor would he on the present occasion linger, with painful minuteness, over every point of horror and

dismay; for he well knew that poor Louisa had already suffered more on his account than he ever wished to inflict upon her: but he told the tale briefly; stated how the man had imprudently got down, and left his horses—how they had run away—and how, in a few seconds, the chaise was dragged over into the pit.

Mrs. Charlton was greatly touched at his account of her son's condition, now that she found she should not have to go out over the common to nurse him; and she was in high good humour with Mr. Morton, expressing her gratitude again and again for all he had done.

But Mrs. Charlton gave proof of her gratitude in the way which Morton could have most desired; for, after talking with him for half an hour, she rose suddenly, as if recollecting that he had had no refreshment, and, blaming herself for her negligence, declared she would go and order some supper to be instantly prepared. Now, she could quite as well have ordered it where she sat: and, therefore, it is but fair to suppose that she considered the feelings of the two lovers, which she knew them right well to be; and giving a hint that she had two or three little things to do, she retired, bidding Louisa let her know, in her own room, when supper was announced.

A faint smile came across Louisa's lip at conduct

which she did not very well understand. But she had soon to turn her thoughts to other and sweeter things; for Morton immediately came over, sat down on the sofa beside her, and, taking her hand in his, pressed his lips upon it.

“ You have been grieved and agitated, dear Louisa,” he said: “ but I trust that good rather than evil may result to Latimer from this accident; and I, you see, am unhurt.”

“ I can scarcely think it possible even yet, Edmond,” she replied. “ When I think on that awful fall it makes my heart still beat,” and she closed her eyes for a moment, with a shudder. Morton gazed at her as she sat with the long black lashes resting on the soft pale cheek, for she had not yet recovered her colour; but when she opened her eyes again, and they met that warm yet tender gaze, the rose came brightly back.

“ Nay, nay, Morton,” she said, “ do not look at me so. There, you are smiling at my fears; but you cannot tell what a woman’s feelings are in such cases. I dare say if we were accustomed to go through dangers as you are, we should treat them lightly too; but we are always left at home, with nothing to do but to ponder over the perils of those we love,” and she bent down her head for a moment, while a tear sparkled upon her eyelids.

It did not roll far down her cheek, for her lover's lips brushed it away; and he soothed her tenderly with assurance that he never did, and never would, expose himself to unnecessary danger.

"And yet," she answered, "I shall never see you leave me without, I dare say, conjuring up all sorts of perils. But tell me, Edmond; what is the real state of poor Alfred,—and have you contrived to disentangle him from those difficulties into which he had plunged himself?"

"I have, my beloved!" replied Morton. "He is now freed from all embarrassments if he will keep himself so. I fear that will never be the case, however; for he has been brought up in habits of extravagance in which he has no right to indulge. But I should propose to you one thing, dear girl, which I know will be agreeable to you. The income he had at first is so much diminished that, with his habits, it will never be sufficient. I can supply him for the present as far as he needs it, but it is always a humiliating thing to be under obligations to one who is nearly a stranger; and I think, when Louisa will consent to be my wife, it may be as well for her, as her own act, not only to make some addition to Mrs. Charlton's income, but also to settle such a sum upon him as will put him beyond all ordinary temptation to incur fresh debts. You may well

do it in your quality of sister ; and perhaps it might rouse any better feelings within him to merit your kindness."

" You are always generous and thoughtful, Edmond," replied Louisa Charlton ; " and it shall be just as you please. I can only say that you go before my wishes, though, perhaps, I might not have ventured to ask you to make such a sacrifice."

" I wish to make none, dear girl," replied Morton ; " this should be done before you are my wife, that it may be all your own act. Otherwise it will lose part of its effect upon him. It will be enough for me to cancel the bond he has given for the money I have furnished, and that shall be done, Louisa, on our wedding-day. I need not tell Louisa Charlton that whatever she may choose to do with any part of her fortune before our marriage, it will be well pleasing to the man she has chosen."

" I wish my poor father could have heard you, Edmond ; it would have removed many of his anxieties on my account," was Louisa's reply, and she leaned her head upon her lover's shoulder, while the tears again filled her eyes.

" Of one thing I have always been satisfied," said Morton, " that wealth ought ever to be looked upon, not as a benefit conferred upon our-

selves for our own gratification, but a precious trust confided to us for its due administration to others. In whatever hands it accumulates, to whomsoever it descends, it is but as a stream collected into a great reservoir to fertilize and refresh all that is around it. If, by what I propose, you can reclaim this young man, the employment of your fortune will be noble and good ; and even should the experiment altogether fail, you will have the satisfaction of knowing that you have done your part. Then, as to Mrs. Charlton, the income she possesses is not sufficient, and of course will be less when you are no longer with her."

"It is very strange," said Louisa thoughtfully, "I mean my father's will. There are some parts of it I do not at all understand. He seemed to love her very much, and yet he leaves her with an insufficient income. I do not think he altogether relied upon her judgment, or her—her—her affection for me ; and yet he"—

She paused, and Morton added, "He leaves you dependent in some degree upon her caprice, you would say, my Louisa. We shall see how she attempts to exercise the authority she has received. Of one thing, however, I am sure, that the law would read that part of the will somewhat differently from what she supposes,

perhaps set it aside altogether. At all events, dear Louisa, I have your promise, rich or poor, you are mine. Is it not so, my beloved?"

"Oh, Edmond!" said Louisa, "you know that I could only wish to possess wealth to place it in the hands of one who would use it as you would. But could you really—nay, I will not ask the question, Edmond—I know you would take her you love, rich or poor; but what ought she to do? ought she to consent?"

"I will give her no choice," answered Morton, pressing her to his heart. "She has given her promise—she has made no condition. She is fast bound, and cannot escape."

"I do not wish it, Edmond, I do not wish it," repeated Louisa, earnestly. "I should hardly have fortitude to cast away such happiness, even for your sake."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

AFTER Morton and Mr. Nethersole had left Mother Brown's cottage, Alfred Latimer lay for several minutes gazing up towards the ceiling of the back room in which he had been placed, where a good deal more lath was apparent than plaster, and that portion of the latter which remained was principally supported by long filaments of horse-hair, which not unfrequently suffered a large mass of mortar to hang waving about in the wind. A small deal table, notched at the edges like a school-boy's desk, and with "Tom Brown" cut in large capitals in two or three places, stood in the middle of the chamber, and on it, in a battered tin candlestick, was a solitary tallow candle, with the top of the wick spreading out into sooty fungi, and the grease weltering down the sides. A tattered old chintz curtain half concealed the window; but where the sash appeared it showed many a piece of glass

wanting, in one spot pasted up with brown paper, while in others the gaping aperture was stuffed up with dirty rags. To these interesting objects the young gentleman turned his eyes, after he had studied the canopy over his head for a considerable time, and then he exclaimed, "D—n it ! This is very strange. Why I feel all knocked about ; and where the devil I am, I can't tell. Surely that is Wilkinson. Why, what is all this ? Where am I ? How came I here ? "

It was very evident that, as not uncommonly happens in such cases, the blow he had received on the head had obliterated all memory of the events immediately preceding. It is generally judged expedient to touch upon the subject of his state, as little as possible with a patient so circumstanced ; but Wilkinson had not studied the matter very deeply, and he consequently set to work, and told him all that had happened. The tale seemed to awaken Alfred Latimer's remembrance ; and when he heard that he was in Mother Brown's cottage, he instantly showed that his recollection was quite unimpaired, by saying in a low voice, "Where are my clothes, Wilkinson ? Put them here on the bed, and do not let the people get at them, for there is a good sum of money in one of the pockets. Don't lose sight of them for a minute, Wilkinson ; for it

would be a devil of an affair if they were to take that."

"Don't you think it would be better to send it to mistress to keep for you, sir?" asked the servant.

"No, curse it! she would keep it with a vengeance," answered her dutiful and respectful son. "I should get it back as soon from them as I should from her."

"Then, why not give it to Mr. Nethersole, to take care of for you till you are well," replied the man.

"Well, perhaps I may," rejoined Latimer; "that's no bad thought—but the doctor is gone, isn't he?"

Wilkinson made him understand that Mr. Nethersole would soon be back; and then warned Mr. Latimer that he ought not to speak, but to remain quiet. Alfred Latimer, however, was not a man to restrain himself in anything; and he continued to ask questions, and to swear at his companion if he answered briefly or remonstrated, till the servant's patience becoming near its end, he replied, "Indeed, Mr. Latimer, I must obey the doctor's orders, and as you will not keep silent, I will go into the other room, but I will take care no one comes in without me."

"Go to the devil, if you like," replied Alfred Latimer; "but snuff the candle first."

The man did as he was directed, and left the room. About half an hour after this Mr. Nethersole returned, and having heard from the servant in the outer room, that Mr. Latimer was very unmanageable; he replied, "Oh! I will keep him quiet. I shall stay here till morning; so you can either remain or go home for an hour or two, as you like; only be back by five o'clock; for I have a case I must see."

"Well, then, sir, I would rather go home for a bit," answered Wilkinson, "I was up early this morning, and I should like a few hours' sleep."

"I wonder where my lad's to sleep," said Widow Brown, in a sullen tone. "That's his bed, in where the younker is lying; and half the things spoiled with blood."

"Oh, never you mind, Mother Brown," answered Mr. Nethersole, who knew his party well, "you'll be paid more than you spend; and as to Tom's sleeping, it is not the first time he has sat up o'nights, I fancy, and won't be the last. You've slept in worse places than this chair, Tom, havn't you? and the shooting season being begun, you must be in practice, or I mistake. You forget who you're talking to, Goody."

"Well, doctor," said Mother Brown, with a

grin, "if he have got a partridge or pheasant now and then, you've had your share on 'em; and better stuff nor ever come out o' your shop, too."

"I know I have had a little present now and then, Mother Brown," replied Mr. Nethersole; "and I never ask where anything comes from but humbug, and that I always send back again. So don't whine to me about where Tom is to sleep."

With this warning, the surgeon walked into the other room; and then shutting the door, he held up his finger again to Mr. Latimer not to speak, sat down by his bed-side, and felt his pulse. "A little fever," he said, as if speaking to himself. "I am afraid there has been some excitement here. In your case, Mr. Latimer, Harpocrates is as good as Hippocrates, and better; but we must make them go hand in hand—Silence, my dear sir! silence! if you please. I am going to sit by your bed-side all night; and if you want anything, just hold up your finger. I shall divine what you want, and give it to you."

"You'll be devilish clever, then," said Alfred Latimer aloud, "for I want something now"—

"Not a word!" said Mr. Nethersole, stopping both his ears; "I will not listen to a word," and approaching the table, he pulled a phial out of his pocket, poured about a third of it out into a little

cup, and presented it to the patient, saying, "drink that. Then turn round on your right side and try to get to sleep. That will compose you wonderfully."

"Why I 'm quite composed already," answered the other.

"You won't be soon, if you go on so," answered Mr. Nethersole, drily, "for in two hours you 'll be in a burning fever if you talk at all; in two days you will be lying composed enough; and in less than two weeks you will go out of that door with your feet foremost."

This speech had the desired effect. Alfred Latimer did not at all like the prospect so unceremoniously presented to him, and he lay down as he was bid and kept silence, while Mr. Nethersole seated himself in the chair by his side, and taking a medical book out of his pocket began to read. Nine times did Mr. Nethersole snuff the candle; and then, as there was no use of snuffing it any longer, he went into the next room and got another. Mother Brown had gone to bed; her son was snoring in a chair; and when he returned the worthy surgeon found that Alfred Latimer was breathing hard too. The example he judged a good one, and bending down his head upon his arms he was soon in that strange mysterious state, wherein the distinction between the life of the body and the life of the soul, is more plain than

in any of the other phenomena of our marvellous existence.

He had gone on for some hours, and Alfred Latimer was still in a sound and comfortable sleep, when the worthy surgeon was suddenly awakened by the opening of the door. He looked up, and saw the widow's son beckoning to him.

"Here's your boy, doctor, wants you quick," said the man, in a low tone.

"The deuce he does," murmured the surgeon; "that Mrs. Tilson come before her time!—she always does—I never saw anything like it."

It was, indeed, as he supposed; and after a brief conference with the boy at the door, he returned and looked at his patient, and then at his watch. The former was still enjoying tranquil repose, and the latter pointed to a quarter past four.

"Wilkinson must be back in three-quarters of an hour at the farthest," said Mr. Nethersole, "and Mrs. Tilson can't wait, that's certain. No great harm can happen; for he's doing quite well. Here, Tom," he continued, putting his head into the next room, and speaking in a low voice to Mother Brown's son; "When Wilkinson returns tell him to give his young master one half of that draught; and to send to me, at Mrs. Tilson's, at Shrewsbury, if anything goes wrong," and going out

he mounted the horse the boy had brought, and rode away.

The moment he had gone Tom Brown set the bottle down upon the table, and put his forefinger to his forehead. He was a dull looking man; but yet there was a keen cunning light stole out of his somewhat oblique eyes when he thus set himself to consider, which had something dangerous and sinister in it.

“Three-quarters of an hour,” he said, meditating, “that’s well nigh an hour, may like. Howsoever, I won’t do nothing alone. I’ll take advice and have help; for he might get up right by chance, and one would have to put him out o pain. Nobody would know it—One knock’s as good as another, and he’s in such a smash ‘t wouldn’t be seen. He said he’d a lot o’ money—I heard un; but he didn’t say how much, so who can tell. We might take a bit, and leave some upon account. Mother could hold the candle while I took the money, and Jack stood by wi’ the poker ready to stop noise.”

It was a perilous moment for Alfred Latimer; and the man walking to the foot of the stairs called his mother; but in so low a voice that she did not hear.

“What’s the matter?” said some one in deep masculine tones. “He’s not dying, is he?”

"Pooh, no!" cried Tom Brown. "Nothing like it at present. I want you, Jack Williams, and mother, too. Go and give her a shake in t' other room."

Jack Williams, without reply, went and woke Mother Brown, who hurried on some rags of clothes, and descended to the room where Williams and her son were already in conference. As she went down she stumbled over an iron pot which had been carelessly put at the foot of the stairs; and the pot, on being disturbed at that hour of the night, uttered a loud complaint. Alfred Latimer started, turned round, and gazed about him. The door between his room and the next had been left partly ajar, and he heard the sound of voices speaking. They were subdued; but yet many, nay, most of the words, were distinct to an ear quickened by a slight degree of feverish excitement, and he heard the tongue of Mother Brown, as she was called, going pretty sharply.

"It's no use taking the flimsies," she said; "they'd be knowed and traced directly, and we should all get nabbed. But I don't see there can be any harm in seeing what yellow boys may be in his pockets. It would be spoony enough to let them go, when he'd know nothing about it. He was always a careless hand, I've heard;

and he might ha' dropped 'em while they were lugging him out of the chay, or arterwards, or any how."

"I'd take the flimsies, too," said her well-educated son. "If we couldn't flash them ourselves, we could get some one to do it. So I'd take all—make a sweep out, and I know what"—

"Well, what do you know?" said a voice which Alfred Latimer instantly recognised as that of Jack Williams.

"Why, I should not like to do anything to him sleeping," answered Tom Brown; "but it would not be a bad job if he woke, and got a quiet knock o' the head—a little would do it now, and no one the wiser."

"And I know what, too," resumed Jack Williams aloud—"that none of you shall take a penny of his, or lay a finger on him. Why, confound you all, he's one of our own friends, and we should act like gentlemen to one another. He'll make as fine a fellow as ever lived one of these days, if a set of puling fools do not get hold of him, and preach the spirit out of him. But I don't think there's much chance of that. The lad's young, and has not had much experience, yet he is sharp enough, and I have seen signs of a bold strong heart in him, and a determined spirit. I'll have no tricks, Tom Brown; so, look

you, Mr. Latimer is under my protection, and let people take a penny from him if they dare."

The conversation did not only fall upon Alfred Latimer's ear, but sunk into his heart. The boldness with which Williams stood forward in his defence touched one of the few better points about him ; and the language that he used was immediately put in strong opposition to that which Quatterly had employed. The latter had shown that in the higher ranks of life, a reputation once even stained could never be rendered wholly pure ; the former proved that good feeling of a particular kind can be mingled with crimes and faults of a very deep dye. He fancied that the door was closed upon him in one course, and that it was open in another ; and that low-toned conversation was more injurious to every good principle than the most potent arguments could have proved, if addressed to himself directly.

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